

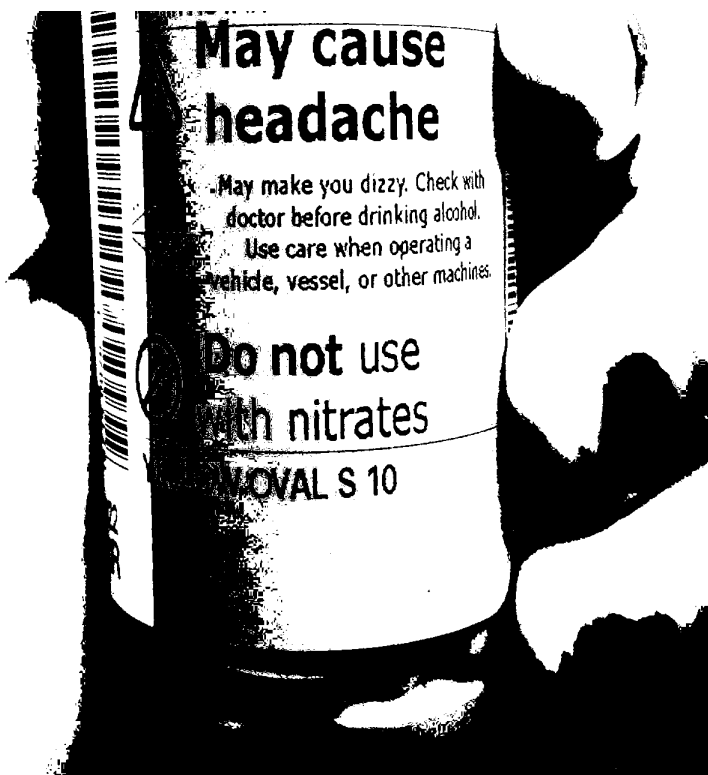
**S.M.D.H.**



SOUR MILK  
DELUXE HARDCORE

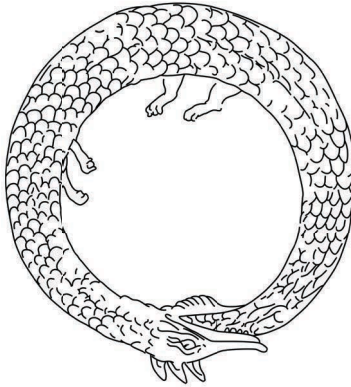
*natalie celeste tautou*

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but like... I'm not a cop... just don't be weird about it, okay?  
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*for the sluts*





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s.m.d.h. compiles material written between 2018 and 2023. During this time the author was frequently mentally ill, hallucinatory, dissociative, occasionally alcoholic, neurotic, suicidal, psychotic, self-harming, sexually frustrated, & doing lots & lots of drugs. These stories are a reflection of the author's state of mind at the time & as such have been edited minimally from their original form. Any part of this may be reproduced freely without the author's consent because who fucking cares. Why do you ask? **PROPERTY IS THEFT. STEAL EVERYTHING YOU CAN. FUCK COPYRIGHT LAW.**

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*apologies*

0

*incesticide*

13

*full moon fever*

27

*downward is heavenward*

47

*sunbather*

91

*thank your lucky stars*

III

*dirty mind*

II7

*last splash*

131

*my body, the hand grenade*

167

*final fantasy fan fiction*

195

*lost dogs : rarities & b-sides*

231

*kill for love deluxe*

247

*afterword*

∞



“I’ve got a blister from touching everyone I see.”

– Hole, *‘Softer, Softest’*

“Beat me out of me.”

– Nirvana, *‘Aneurysm’*

INVESTMENT

# DADDY HITS ME

so hard all the stars come out the dark to dance with us. I spun across the living room landing against mother's dusty old glass display cabinet knocking two little cherubs to the hardwood floor smashing them into a thousand little pieces. Mother doesn't pay us any mind. She just sits there staring out with her eyes offset to nowhere hooked up to her machines. They a loud beeping sound every few seconds as they breathe her inward and outward.

"YOU SEE WHAT MADE ME DO, MANDY?" Every word refracts off everything into a chorus. "EVERY ACTION HAS ITS CONSEQUENCE. LOOK AT THE MESS YOU'VE MADE."

I head for the kitchen as he yells at me, picking up a shard of porcelain in my left heel as I walk, too distracted by my aching jaw to even notice myself trailing blood across the hardwood. I touch my cheek, feel the soreness and heat, the rush coming up from beneath me all over again.

He's still yelling at me through the wall. Though I can't make out the words, I've always found the sound strangely comforting. There's a harshness to it washes over me like the ocean, drowning out everything else into a single point of focus. I can't quite recall anything else ever made me feel this calm before.

Maybe the accident. I'm back there every other time I close my eyes. Cold wind and rain through the broken windows, Mae's gurgling twitching mouth with the rebar stuck through her teeth out the base of her skull. She was only thirteen when she died. Just your typical American girl; loved Jesus and horses and songs about boys. Now she's just a fountain of blood with a hole run through.

It all happened so fast I couldn't remember what the crash even felt like. All I remember is staring at her bleeding out in her lap. My neck was too broken to look away and my eyes bruised open so they couldn't shut. I just prayed she'd stop moving soon, just be out of her misery.

Daddy's labored breathing was the only reminder I wasn't completely alone.

There's a kind of closeness you can only get from sharing witness to a death. Guess I know how the apostles felt. Takes something big like that to finally make sense of what daddy used to always tell me: "You only hurt the ones you love." I repeat it like a mantra every time he hits me until it feels more like a kiss.

My jaw still hurts but I don't feel no pain. If anything I feel overcome with love.

As I reach for the broom a smile stretches across my face.

\* \* \*

There's no trying save me. Don't even begin to start. I could never be good enough. You don't know how bad I've been. You don't know the secrets I've kept hid. I've earned every bruise and laceration; every single scar. You can smell it in my breath. I reek with sin. I am absolutely filthy in it. Aren't we all sinners in God's eyes? We ain't worthy of the dirt they throw us in.

I deserve it all for what I've done with mother's garden alone. All the lilies bloomed and blossomed but I couldn't stop their withering. One night I left the greenhouse vent open and it stormed and half her roses drowned. Rot and mold spread quick like wildfire. Eventually summer came and turned everything black and dry.

Everything I touch sours and dies. So I don't mind whatever pain comes my way. I've made my peace with God.

The kingdom of heaven is mine.

I turn around naked in the mirror staring at the splotches spread across my skin like roots. Each one I touch rings out an echo of the night it formed. Every ache blooms like watercolor, swelling into something fierce, bathing me in fire. Making me feel pure again.

You ever seen those priests that flagellate themselves as they pray the rosary?

I stand there for about half an hour, fingertips gliding from memory to memory.

Each and every night, as I lay me down to sleep, a rift of blinding rapture opens up in the white stucco ceiling above my bed and a swarm of angels descend upon me. Divine light shines pure love, holy fingers filling me with bliss. Golden rays of pearl warmth illuminate every crevice, until there's no part of me left unconsecrated. Their love burns through everything. I cannot breathe.

\* \* \*

Laika knew exactly how I felt about her Godless ways. Daddy didn't care much for them either, but we needed her, the both of us, so we tried our best to make nice.

She moved back into her room in the attic, which daddy left untouched since she ran away, and she's been living there ever since then, mostly just keeping to herself when she isn't caring for mother.

I'm scrubbing mud off the tile in the kitchen when she opens the fridge and grabs herself a beer.

"Isn't it a little early to be drinking?" I say smugly.

"Never stopped dad," she pops the cap off with her lighter and takes a swig. "You want one?"

"I'm eighteen, Laika."

She sighs and leans against the freshly polished marble counter. "I'm not a fucking cop, Mandy. It's fucking beer..."

"You shouldn't cuss," I say, moving on to the next tile. "It's sinful. And ugly."

"Yeah, whatever, who gives a shit. Look. Dad gets off at five. It's eleven now. That means he won't be home for another nine hours. So, like. You want a beer or no?"

"No means no."

"Well okay then. If you change your mind you'll know where to find me."

\* \* \*

I set the mop and the bucket in the shed by the greenhouse and wash my hands off in the sink. I can still see the ring around my eye in the reflection off the water as it drains. My lip is split and puffy, sore to the touch. My cheek still stings, ringing out, making me woozy.

I think to myself, maybe Laika's right. Maybe alcohol would help numb the pain a bit.

Jesus turned water into wine. If the Son of God could partake why not me? Why should I abstain from the fruits of His glory?

I'm not going to lie, I know it's all delusion. What am I trying to fool myself? I ain't nowhere near purity. Otherwise I wouldn't deserve this. Absolution requires a sinner to repent.

Part of me knows she already let the Devil in.

\* \* \*

Laika's nailed all the corks from the wine she's drunk to the inclined walls of the steeped roof and wound all our old Christmas lights around them, turning the ceiling into a soft rainbow crevice that looks higher than it actually was. Posters for bands with names I can't read are everywhere and a fine layer of dust coats everything. It smells like someone built a library in the Wal-Mart garden section. There's a couch and a coffee table and a TV with her old Nintendo 64 and a stereo and a desk with her computer and a bunch of old books and movies and other bric-a-brac strewn about.

"Wanna watch something?" she asks, turns on the TV.

"Sure, I guess..." I say, crashing on the worn-out plaid sofa.

"What do ya wanna watch?" She heads to a bookshelf next to the windows looking out, reaches behind a big hardbound *X-Men* collection and pulls out a long, green, opalescent glass apparatus and takes it back to the couch.

"I dunno, daddy doesn't really let me watch TV..."

"You ain't got, like, any shows you like or whatever?" She plops down right next to me, sets down the alchemical device and picks up the remote.

I just shrug and smile. "I'll watch whatever you want to watch..." I take a sip of the beer I stole out the fridge. It tastes frothy, bitter, and heavy. Bitterer than I expected. I grimace and take another sip.

"You sure about that?" She picks up a lighter off the table, ignites the stem sticking out the bulbous bottom chamber, sucking at the gaping maw of its neck, summoning a rod of monstrous, billowing smoke, tugging up on the stem, disappearing the gray plume into her lungs. "You ever seen *Twin Peaks*?"

\* \* \*

I'm crying on my bedroom floor, trying real hard to keep my volume down so daddy doesn't hear me. My hands grip the carpet and I sob gently, holding back a scream. I remind myself over and over again what daddy always told me: "*Good girls don't cry.*"

Good girls don't kiss their sisters, either.

I didn't mean to kiss her. I didn't mean any of it. I shouldn't have smoked with her. I was high and drunk and stupid. What was I even thinking?

Tears well up atop the saturated brown shag, forming tiny little warm saltwater lakes between my fingers.

She was there, and I was there with her, and it felt really nice. I'd never felt that nice before, except maybe with daddy. I'd curled up into the crook of her arm, like we used to when we were little, and she was holding me, and it felt so serene, like the backseat of a car. Like how we used to fall asleep beneath a blanket watching cartoons when we was little.

It was all white heat and flash. It all happened so fast I can't barely remember any of it. But it keeps playing over and over again in my

mind. The moment of contact.

*Stop it.*

Why can't I forget this?

Grind my teeth until my jaw aches. Quivering, chapped slit for a mouth.

Why couldn't I erase the way she looked at me from my mind?

*Stupid.*

You wanted it though.

*Liar.*

Pull my hair back, pull at the scalp. Feel a million little pinpricks in the back of my neck.

*Horrible.*

I knew it was wrong the moment our lips touched.

*Disgusting.*

So why did I give in?

*Pervert.*

Dig my nails into the notches in my spine, scraping the surface of my skin away, feeling tiny streams of warm blood pool up from the freshly exposed dermis.

I remember what the priest used to tell me in youth group about original sin, how every soul has a stain on it you can never scrub out. He said no matter how ugly it was Jesus didn't mind, so long as you didn't try and hide it from him.

But I choked on the words in the confessional.

The ceiling doesn't open up tonight. Not now, not ever again. I can hear the door cracking open; I hear daddy standing over me, breathing heavy, eyes shut tight so he thinks I'm asleep. But no seraphim to grace me with their glory.

\* \* \*

Morning is dead quiet. Laika inserts mother's feeding tube while I make everyone eggs and bacon with grits and toast and butter and jam

and coffee. Daddy sits there reading the paper all dressed up for work. No one speaks a word before I say grace.

“Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, amen.”

I pray no one notices the tremble in my voice.

Laika eats quick and heads upstairs without a word or a glance. Daddy puts his newspaper down and clears his throat. “You, um.” He blows his nose and flashes his teeth. “Whatever happened to that dress I bought you?”

“That one with the little fish all over it?”

“No, no. Not that one. The yellow one. The sundress.”

“Oh, I.” I blush. “I guess I forgot I had that one.”

“Maybe you can wear it to church next Sunday,” he smiles. think you’d look just darling.”

“Aww, thanks, daddy,” I smile.

“You know,” he drinks his coffee black. “When I look at you now, you look just how I imagined she would always would grow up to be. If she were still with us. You look just like an angel.”

\* \* \*

I found daddy’s liquor cabinet today. I didn’t mean to be in his big walk-in closet, but there I was, and I saw the door was cracked, and I couldn’t keep myself from going in. I’m not sure why but I just couldn’t keep myself from looking in there.

Now I’m sitting on the closet floor, hands shaking, wishing it was only liquor I found in there.

There were all these pictures, dozens of them, hundreds, maybe, I couldn’t quite tell you; all I know is it was more than I could wrap my head around. There were a bunch of different envelopes stuffed full of

all these Polaroids. Marked, dated, various locations, worn out corners where they'd been stamped and shoved through the mail.

I don't even want to describe what was on them.

Weighing them down was a camera I recognized as the same one daddy used to bring out to take Christmas and birthday photos and photos of school events and stuff like that.

There's several bottles of unmarked pills here I don't recognize.

I should've run right then and there and just forgot about everything. But I couldn't look away, either.

Photograph after photograph of me with daddy. *Who took these, then?* I don't remember any of these moments, and yet, here I am, all dolled up, sitting on his lap. Made up all garish, like a harlot, or an actress. *I don't own any cherry red lipstick. I don't own any heels or fishnets.* Here I am in the passenger seat of his other car, the Chrysler. Here I am snuggling the teddy bear he bought me for my birthday in the corner of a couch I do not realize.

My eyes are closed, painted over to look like they're open.

Here's one of us having tea in mother's greenhouse. He's smiling, happy, and he's rigged my mouth into a grin, with hooks attached to wires pulling up on the corners of my mouth. I'm not sure how he's done it, but it looks like he's set up some sort of apparatus to hoist up and pose my unconscious body. Steel lines trail down from out of frame to straps around my wrists, my ankles, to a harness on my back, propping me up like some kind of marionette. At least, in the pictures where I'm sitting or standing.

Here's another where I'm lying in daddy's bed. I'm naked in the next one.

Whose arm is this?

How young am I in this one?

What is that... *thing*?

I think I'm gonna vomit.

\* \* \*

Laika finds me sobbing there drunk after cleaning up mother for the week. I was really screwed up, burning antiseptic from the liquor. Dull and distant. Nothing she says sounds clear and she can't seem to get a coherent explanation from me, but it's not like the pictures and everything aren't there scattered all around, so she figures it out pretty quite. She seems just as repulsed as me.

"What the fuck are we gonna do now, sis?"

"I just don't care anymore," I slur. My head burns but I'm out of tears to cry. "I just don't even care. What are they gonna believe us?"

She mutters something under her breath and paces around. "Well, fuck, Mandy. Alright? Let's just think all this over. Because, like, the common thread here is *you* and..." she shakes her head. "What do *you* want to do about it?"

I can't help but laugh. What do *I* want to do? I'd spent my whole life waiting on others to tell me what I should want to do.

I laugh and start chugging out another bottle.

"Hey easy, *Jesus*..." Laika grabs the whiskey from me. "You're gonna kill yourself drinking like that."

"Ha ha yea? What if I did?"

"Maybe you can think of someone, I don't know. *Better* to kill? Jesus, *fuck*..." she runs her fingers through my hair.

I don't like how she keeps taking the Lord's name in vain but Laika's right.

I snatch the booze out her hand and race down the stairs.

"Hey! Uhm. What are you up to, sis?" I grab the railing to catch myself from.

Mother's in her bedroom, right where Laika left her. Her life support chair looks woefully out of place among the seafoam green half-paneled walls and all the glossy lacquered antique furniture.

"Mandy?"

I don't hesitate to pop out her glass eye where the metal ran through. Mother doesn't so much as flinch. Just drools a little on her

gown. Makes a bit of a noise. I look down the hole past the wrinkled skin of her eyelid. Like a tunnel made of congealed hamburger and fiberglass. I burp and grip the arm of the chair to steady myself.

“You know what the doctor told us He said it was a miracle she survived at all, considering all the damage. It’s kind of funny, you know, said she really ought to be dead.” I take another swig of whiskey. “Said it was a miracle she lived.”

“Mandy?”

“I mean, just look at her. You think God’s the one keeping her alive? Does this look like living to you?” I sigh into my hand. “Gosh I’ve been so *stupid...*” and I can’t help but laugh. All these years I’d been waiting for her to wake just so I could say my last goodbyes. But it all felt so obvious now. She was just a machine for breathing hooked up to a machine for breathing. Daddy didn’t want to let her go, but she wasn’t really with us anymore.

I put the neck of the bottle in the hole and shove it home from the bottom. There’s some resistance but not much, really. I push it deep down there until the neck disappears and tilt her head back until the bottle’s upright and I watch it glug glug glug like a water cooler as it empties into the half-empty cavity in her head.

For the first time in months it kind of looks like she’s happy.

\* \* \*

Just before the room can spin out in a fading whirr of hyperventilation Laika shuts the bedroom door behind us and orders us a pizza.

Daddy doesn’t come home that night.

She sets me down on the couch in the attic and puts on some old episodes of *The Simpsons*. “Here,” she throws a blanket over me on the couch. “You’re shivering,” she says. “How does it feel?”

“What do you mean?” The rainbow lights are spinning; I set one foot on the floor to tether myself.

“You know... to take a life? I've always wondered...” she stares off out the window into the black, cloudless sky.

I shoved another slice down my throat. “It doesn't feel like nothing.”

She holds me close 'til there's nothing left but us and the TV.

“I'm fucking proud of you, Mandy.”

My dreams are feverish and vague. I'm flying over white grassy plains and fluffy little clouds through an orange sky. There's a gate on the horizon reaching upward into forever. I got a feeling they're not gonna let me anywhere near it.

When I wake up it's daybreak. My skull feels like it's about to split in two, and Laika isn't here. Disney+ is asking: “ARE YOU STILL WATCHING?”

As I head down the stairs I notice a sound like Velcro being pulled. Over and over, intermittent, coming from down the hallway, from around my bedroom, behind my door. I slow my pace and listen quietly, then walk down the second flight of stairs.

In the greenhouse I grab my mother's pair of garden shears.

The Velcro sound's getting more and more frequent as I head back up the stairs towards my bedroom. My heart is beating in my throat. I gulp, take a deep breath, steady myself, and reach for the handle to the door.

I see the device whoever took those pictures used to pose me.

It's this large, collapsible metal frame attached to arms that hook up and over to rig wires. I follow with my eyes from the base up the rusted struts and joints down the wires to see my sister dangling from the end like a human puppet.

There's a slit running down her. Her stomach's been split open, all her insides spilled out onto the carpet below, leaving an empty cavity beneath her exposed breasts.

A quiet, calm voice comes from the corner of the room. “Do you see what you've made me do?”

Daddy's at my closet, taking my clothes off the hangers, tearing

them apart and throwing the scraps of fabric aside.

"Everything you do has a consequence. Now, look at all *this*. Do you understand now? Do you see what happens?"

This gnawing sensation in my gut as I kneel down beside her.

I brush the hair out of my sister's face. Or at least, what would have been her face. Her lower jaw is intact, teeth lined up all pretty in a row, swinging gently, limp, like a hinge. But above that... The smell alone makes me retch. Her skull looks like it's been dug out with a giant melon baller. Everything behind her ears and hairline is still intact but everything coming outward below her forehead, including her ears, has been carved away from her, leaving a slick, bloodied purple and white and pink and black bowl of meat and bone in the shape of the end of an ice cream scoop. Tongue bloated, dangling out the side like a cartoon. Drooling red and clear onto the pile of guts steaming underneath her. Like some real-life *Itchy & Scratchy* cartoon.

"Why couldn't you have just been a good girl like you promised," he says, turning to face me. He isn't angry. Just disappointed. "After everything I've done for you." I feel frozen in place, trying to will my limbs into action, but everything feels stuck and slow, like everything's been submerged in honey.

"Do you know how much I've suffered to make this work?" Daddy staggers over the clothes and hangers on the floor, past Laika's dangling remains, right up to tower over me. He reaches out and plucks the garden shears from my hand. "What were you even planning on doing with these?" He laughs and tosses them aside and slaps me with the backside of his left hand.

The rings on his fingers make a loud *pop* against my cheekbone, like a batter hitting a home run. I spiral around, banging my face into my mirror. Next thing I'm on the carpet and I can't hear nothing but catching my breath and the tinkle of broken glass trickling out the frame.

My vision's all a blur as tears well up. Painfully, he lifts my head off the carpet by the hair. I hear his fist beating against me, but I'm well

past the point of feeling. I barely have time between the beatings to form anything resembling a coherent thought.

Eventually nothing's left but will and instinct. My hand heads towards the pile of broken glass on the carpet. I firmly grasp the first shard that feels sizable. The edges run into my flesh, making my hand one with the mirror. I stare up through swelling eyes at the blur above me hold my breath, wait once more for his fist to wind back, then swing wildly at his throat.

The shard digs deep into his Adam's apple; I feel it catch bone. I watch him stagger back through my tears, grasping dumbly at the gash weeping down his neck. Wheezing, this look of fear in his eyes, just like back in the accident. To think I thought he looked so very vulnerable. Empathetic, even. So very human.

Now I realize he's just the same as me.

I drop the mirror shard and use my hands to climb up the wail, trailing crimson from the gash. I look at my palms and I can see bone through the flesh but everything feels zoomed out, like a waking dream, or a movie. My vision's smeared over with this Vaseline of unreality. Like none of this was actually really happening.

He's looking up at me on one knee, hunched over, one hand on his throat, trying uselessly to stop the blood flow. I circle around him, grab him by the back of his hair, like how he used to grab me, gash in my hand where I cut myself weeping down him like a crown of thorns. Grunt as he weakly tries to break out of my grasp before he realizes any more effort on his behalf would expedite the bleeding out his neck. This is where he belongs now. This is where I want him. He's positioned just *exactly* right for me to shove his handsome face down into Laika's steaming, wet entrails.

So that's exactly what I do.

Down in the shed by the greenhouse, there's tanks of gas for the lawnmower. There's gallons of lighter fluid and rubbing alcohol and turpentine, if I know where to look. There's all that liquor in the cabinet.

I'm gonna douse every square inch of this house and burn it all to the ground, until the fires consume me, until they burn away all the flesh, all that remains of this family, until there's nothing left but blackened wood and ash.

First things first, however. I'm gonna hold him down right where he belongs. I'm gonna hold daddy's head in my sister's mess, gargling, gagging, shuddering, all our warmth and hate and fluids mingling together, until he just can't fight it any more.



FULL MOON

FEVER

# EARS RINGING HEAD

banging split lips drool flung circle each other round the pit all hot sweat thick air strangers pressing wet flesh crashing sweat slick slipping over against each other shoving hard hair in teeth scratches on exposed ribs jabbing elbows thrashing blur through flashes black white baby amethyst strobe grinding whirl churns eternal descending riff swallowed up by crash symbols howling blast beats bodies like water in an endless spiral whorl

In her black leather jacket Jessi feels more *Super Mario Bros. 3* airship level than human, a moving wall of spikes and chains and bullets and bombs and fire. Tattooed flesh and gauged ears and surgical steel; her face set off metal detectors.

Kim trails behind holding hands in her old worn-out Sub-Pop LOSER shirt faded and blanketed with cigarette burns. More than content to follow, but confident and self-reliant. Jessi tells people she's like the ideal switch because, like, most switches like to say they're switches but really they're just bottoms who only top to make themselves subservient to other bottoms but Kim was different. Kim was the real deal: as likely to rail you in a sundress as get railed in one.

The bar is all scuffed tile, painted over thick layers of impasto matte black paint, bartender framed by dusty neon signs. Jessi flags them down.

"What do you wanna drink??" Jessi asks Kim. A Black Flag song blares from some unseen speaker. "*NOTHING. NOTHING. NOTHING LEFT INSIDE.*"

"Heineken."

"Heineken??"

They grin and finish in unison:

*"Fuck that shit!! PABST!! BLUE!! RIBBON!!"*

Jessi smokes half a bowl in the graffiti-plastered stall while Kim takes some bumps of ketamine from some very pretty lesbians. She

coughs, flushes, fixes her dick, exits the stall, black boots crossing the tacky eggshell tile to the sink, laughter erupting from the corner as she turns on the faucet, cheap lounges in the corner worn and cracked from needing to be disinfected and wiped down every other night; currently crawling with bodies.

"...So anyways, I look her dead in the eye, and I tell her 'gender critical's the condition she's gonna be in when I kick her fucking teeth in!"

Some exchange students erupt in an uncomfortable, drunken laughter.

"Oh my God are you telling them about our theatre class?"

"They named a fucking building after her..." Kim says.

"The Fuller Center of Performing Arts," says a student with a Russian accent in a Machine Girl shirt.

"For," another student corrects him.

"Ugh," Jessi rolls her eyes and dries her hands off. "That bitch. Who was it she said threw the first brick at Stonewall??"

"Valerie Solanas??" Kim scoffs and takes another key bump. Jessi makes a face.

"That doesn't even make any fucking sense!! She was in jail!! For killing Andy fucking Warhol!!"

"Good for her!!" rings out from a stall.

"No no don't you remember??" Kim says. "Billy Name bailed her out!! Did like a *Shawshank Redemption* sort of thing."

"Which makes total sense."

"It was actually a woman's march across the street she was throwing. They were blocked off by cops and she started throwing bricks to clear the route."

"Right," Jessi chuckles. "And they pinned it all on the trannies for *some* reason."

"Uhh. Because trans women aren't *real* women!! Duh!!" Kim passes her the little baggie and the key. "The NYPD are actually *very*

feminist when you *really* think about it, the way they bifurcate jails...” Jessi cringes at recognizing that line.

“Fucking fascist terf cunt...” she mutters then snorts.

“You just said the same thing three times...” Kim says, then leans in and whispers quiet in her ear: “*Remember that scream when we bled her?? So fucking delicious...*” She nibbles at her ear.

“*Shut up and kiss me you faggot.*”

They make out for a while until everyone else feels weird and leaves. Then they head out the bar into the piss yellow glow of the back alleyway. They start asking around for a cigarette until a guy in a Burzum shirt and long hair like Fenriz offers them some Marlboro Blacks.

“Thank you,” Kim says.

“Hell yeah no problem ha ha you know I think I saw you two in the pit,” he says.

“Oh yeah??”

“Yeah I mean I was in there for a bit but I just wasn’t feeling it. Kinda weak to be honest. Real basic shit. No teeth,” he snorts.

“Uh huh.”

“Yeah I mean I guess I’m just not really into this modern scene shit you know. I’m more into like old school brutal shit right?? Raw shit. Emperor, Dissection, D.S.O., Mgła, Revenge... none of that lamestream pussy ass queer bullshit they review on Pitchfork. I can’t mosh to that. I got standards.” He hocks a loogie on the pavement. “Like I don’t really give a shit about politics you know I hate how it’s gotten lately, and I mean I get it, I used to be an anarchist or whatever but I mean I was just a kid back then. We all know what it’s like growing up with cringe politics, right?? Well I grew out of that shit. You start more fires with fire than songs about fire. So I may not be ‘woke’ or whatever, if that’s a problem, but I don’t really give a shit?? Basically what I’m saying is I’m a nihilist. I just wanna burn it all down to be honest. Like at this point how fucked up the whole world is. Kill ‘em all. Nuclear war now. Get it

all over with. I hope I didn't freak you out. I know I got this like tendency to just not shut up. Ha ha."

He stands there for a moment sipping his beer. Kim asks if he wants to smoke some meth.

Some cops pass so they follow him down the back roads to smoke in his big red truck beneath pale flickering light all the while he won't shut up how he was almost a touring drummer for Imperial Triumphant but he got lost the gig over some shit he said on Twitter. "It's like, all those New York fuckers, they think they're so fucking smart, they got all their bookstores and culture and shit but they got no fucking sense of humor. Everyone takes everything so fucking serious over there. Everything's gotta be on some Bob Dylan shit, trying to be all deep and shit. Like... the scene there is soooo pretentious, I mean... you bitches you ever read that uhhh you-know-who that Liturgy faggot's manifesto on 'transcendental black metal'?? Shit's so fucking retarded. Religion's for posers. Like how the fuck you see the world how it is and you're still *not* an atheist?? Degenerate behavior. You know better than that though. I don't know what it is about you two but I see girls like you and I know you know people's all the same dying organic bullshit as other people. Don't matter what you look like on the outside. Like I could really give a shit if you're traps or crossdressers or whatever you are just cause you're tall or like the jaw or like you're a little hairy or whatever. Not that there's nothing wrong with that. Takes all kinds. I don't judge. You know that's just how the women are built in Norway?? That's just genetics. Don't make you better or worse than anyone else. We all rot just the same. You two are really pretty by the way. The both of you I mean. Not to be a faggot or anything ha ha."

Soon as he turns the engine over Jessi's got the bungee cord around his neck. As he struggles to get a grip on the taut elastic cutting off his windpipe Kim's leaning over from the passenger seat holding a long thin metal rod with a wooden handle worn smooth and dark from exposure to the sweat of her palm. An icepick. She pulls herself over him, gripping him by the scalp, arching his neck back; mounts him, puts the

tip of the pick at the corner of his tear duct, palm on the back, shoves it down, deeper and deeper, until he stops clawing at her and goes limp all over. She grips his skull by the hair and yanks the icepick back out. A single strand of blood mixed with a thin clear fluid flows down his face like a trickle of piss down a leg.

They haul him to the bed of the truck and pull a blue tarp Jessi finds in there over the body. She weighs the corners down with loose rocks they find in the bed. "Well that's awful convenient." They decide to take Burzum shirt's car back home.

Jessi finds some Deftones in the CD visor above the passenger seat. The one they made on drugs with all the songs about fucking. They pull onto the interstate and watch the jagged coke-bottle teeth of their sister city cut through a hazy sky. Everything's a blur as she speeds up and cuts past three cars into the fast lane.

Killing always made Kim feel like she was rolling on molly. Soon as they were in that car she just couldn't keep her hands off Jessi. Stroking the leather, running her fingertips up her thigh...

"Hey easy tiger, *relax*," Jessi shoves her back in her seat. She melts into the matted fabric, melts as Jessi's fingers trace down her sweat-soaked shirt and unbuckle her cheap stretch pleather pants.

"Ha ha what are you --"

Jessi *slaps* her hard against her cheek, turning all the glowing red tail lights a Winamp visualizer ocean of prismatic flaring stars. Double lines curving down over the decline like the back of a serpent splinter into a river of of yellow strips. Tears well up as she rejoins her mind and gasps:

"...Fuck...!!"

Another *slap* stings across her cheek.

"Did I fucking tell you you could speak??"

"No I --"

*Slap.*

The impact sends Kim spiraling out above herself, a wet drooling mess of excited whimpers. Fingers feel in the dark.

“What a slut, *gosh*. Heh. You're not even wearing any panties...”

“*Shut u--*”

*Slap.* Her skin turns electric, veins of static rippling through her fingertips. Her tongue goes limp. Jessi flicks her thumb over the tip of her clit.

“God you're already *wet you fucking whore.*” She licks her teeth and clears her throat. “You should pull those down.”

Kim obeys. She feels something cold, solid, defined like tight-knit scales; knurled steel all along the length of her clit. Jessi wraps her fingers around the other side, running the texture up and down from beneath her, tracing the dark strip leading up to where the tip peaked out the foreskin. They pull into a tunnel. Jessi flicks the blade open, holds it close up against Kim's throat with a steady hand. Keeps it there as she takes an exit with the other hand.

“Don't move,” she instructs her firmly. She glances down to the pulsing wet stream leaking down the tip of her clit into her bush, glistening like dewdrops in the passing lights. “Are you cumming already you fucking stupid slut??” Jessi mocks. Kim gasps -- *Slap.*

“*Did I tell you you could fucking speak??*” Out the lemon glow of the tunnel into the icy blue and amber. Jessi closes the blade and instructs Kim to bite the handle. Kim grits it between her teeth. Then Jessi coats her hand in her cum and rubs and slides it all up and down her throbbing, weeping clit as she pulls off the interstate onto Lyndale. Her body is the empty space between the rumble of the asphalt.

She doesn't really stop cumming until they pull into the garage.

They fix themselves up for a moment in silence. Then Jessi cuts the engine and helps Kim get the body out the truck bed and drag it upstairs.

The moon is blood orange through the giant octagonal window overlooking the streets below. Their loft is almost empty except for Kim's implements: a bookshelf stuffed with musky old tomes; a desk and a chair with which to read them; some stationary and writing utensils; another bookshelf lined with candles; glass boxes of gemstones;

sanctified boxes of chalk; flasks and jars of river, ocean, and lake water (blessed and normal); ritual knives and razor blades; a whetstone; a selection of worn tarot decks; an assortment of feathers; bags of herbs and organic matter, melted halves of candles; silver plates; bibles; orbs; hand mirrors for scrying, etc.

Kim grabs the chalk and pulls out a heavy, well-worn book with most the letters rubbed off the spine. Meanwhile Jessi undresses the guy in the Burzum shirt. She goes through his wallet and pockets sixty bucks and a Chipotle gift card. Then she takes off the rest of his clothes and puts them in the burn bucket. Grabs a wet rag and flips him over.

Thankfully this guy didn't shit himself too bad. There'd been a few times with the others before when it wasn't even solid.

She takes the burn bucket downstairs and throws it in the bed of the truck and pulls the tarp over it then heads back up into the bathroom by the attic stairs. Turns the water on scalding and scrubs her hands raw. Takes a glimpse in the mirror but she can't recognize her reflection and her eyes ache if she glimpses for too long.

Jessi always hated fucking mirrors.

Jessi knows Kim's done drawing the sigil because she feels that *thing* inside her head again, like a tiny ball of ice the size and shape of those cream white progesterone capsules she shoves up her ass every night, except instead it's made of mercury. It doesn't necessarily hurt, it just feels... Alien. Unworldly. Wrong. Like the sigil feels wrong in and of itself. Looking at it feels like licking a nine volt battery and sticking it to your eyeballs. It was so beautiful it almost made her want to cry if she could bear it.

Jessi's didn't know what any of the the symbols meant and neither did Kim. They're impossible to transcribe or even translate from the page they're printed on to another; magic forms shift and squirm and hide if you try to copy, replicate, or even trace them. Not that you'd want to. It'd be counterproductive. The ritual itself calls for intuition. The symbols come out perfect if you follow through with the motions.

All it takes is a little faith. They hang brightly on the well-worn warping floorboards, seeming to levitate beneath them.

Jessi drags the body to the center as Kim places and lights eight big black candles at the points where the octagram touches the edges of the circle. They strip down naked and take their places, Jessi with her back to the window and Kim right across from her. They lock eyes, synchronize their breaths and begin to chant the words on the page they know by heart.

Kim was always real casual about it afterwards but Jessi'd be lying if she said it still didn't freak her the fuck out. The way Kim's eyes glowed like ball lightning (judging from sensation, presumably hers, too); the flickering strobing ecstasy; a feeling so inarticulate only because it comprised everything she couldn't feel. She's holding the razor blade Kim gave her and together in unison and they run it down from the crook of their elbows down the length of their forearm, overflowing black crimson ocean welling up and drooling onto the wood beneath them, like a waterfall all the way down to the wrist, down the palm, down the joints of their middle fingers. Blood fills the sigil out, dying it with their collective stain, making it glow with a grim portent.

All the sudden the air feels heavy, fills with static and crackles. A manifestation of terrible hunger lingers above the body at the center of the floor, gnawing a hole opening up above them into another reality. A gaping nothing swells into existence, biting at the edges of the air and warping them around itself with fisheye lens.

The body rises up off the floor, arches backwards, dead sockets staring out blankly at nothing, or perhaps some empty bliss beyond this world. There was no time to consider whatever it does or does not seem to witness. The skin ripples and pushes outward at the stomach, limbs lurching before going all stiff, twisting, bones splintered as everything spirals in and around on itself, draining all the blood out in a thin column through the belly button into a floating ball of blackish red fluid.

As their words deepen the sphere goes supernova, stretching out into an intricate array that looks like someone strung a bunch of tall, thin trees and bushes together into the shape of a person. A circulatory system in the shape of its container, traced in the air.

They do not react to any this because they have already watched it happen six times before.

The blood vitrifies and it shatters in a million tiny bits the size of diamonds on a watch face swirling around the gaping spherical hole as they realign themselves into a blasphemous geometry. A terrible sound emanates from the gape; something awful. It makes them feel like their heads are about to explode. Jessi struggles to hold back from puking. The un-light flickers through in fragments, casting sacred six-dimensional shadow fractals across the canted wooden walls; some divine frequency resonates through their veins, like the dying of an engine.

Lids shut tight but still omnipresent. Hidden machinations click into gear. An eyelash falls to the wooden floor. From its origin they've all just opened up and they're staring right at you.

Then just like that it's over. The candles have all been blown out. A pile of ashes smoldering at the center of the fading chalk marks.

\* \* \*

They're both up late taking care of burning the truck, so they don't wake up until one, and they're both very sore and tired and fuzzy in the head.

"You feeling any different??" Jessi asks.

"Not really... You??"

"I mean I feel like I do but I feel like I do because I want to feel like I do. You know??"

"Seven men for seven moons..."

They're eating Cinnamon Toast Crunch and watching *Always Sunny* between bong rips. Light slipped through the slits of the blinds, cutting gashes in the shadow.

"But like it should've worked..." Kim says, propping her bare feet on the coffee table. "I mean. We followed it step by step..."

The gashes on their forearms had healed immediately following the ritual, as they did the other six times. But Jessi tries to make a new cut and it doesn't close right back up like it's supposed to. It just keeps bleeding like normal.

"Something's wrong. I don't know what it is but something feels fucking off about it."

After breakfast/lunch/whatever Kim hops in the shower while Jessi loads her *Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne* save. Does some demon fusion, buys some items, then dies in a random encounter.

Frustrated she storms off into the loft, takes the tome back off the bookshelf and thumbs through it on the table. Sunshine catches all the tiny flecks of dust hanging in midair as they fall to the page on words who's significance had eluded the both of them, but were now prescient and clarifying.

"Oh."

\* \* \*

"Like, no one even calls it Penetration Park anymore, dude. That guy, Craig Finn? He's been living in Brooklyn since before The Hold Steady was even a band."

They smoke a joint at the lake and watch the sun set, turns the sky pale gray to yellow-orange then red violet and crashed computer blue.

"Yea no I think this guy's from Florida," Kim says, checking her phone again.

"Well that would explain a lot," Jessi says. "How the fuck did you meet this dealer anyways??"

"I'd tell you, but then I'd have to kill you."

Jessi chuckles then goes all silent.

They're walking around the trail when Kim says: "Hey."

Jessi freezes and stutters, then starts walking again. "What's up??"

"I think you know what's up," Kim says. "I think we both know what's up. It's. You know." She gestures vaguely. "It still wants something from us. I think we both knew this from the start, we just didn't want to say anything because, you know..."

"Stop."

"Jessi. *Please*."

"Please no let's don't okay?? Not that."

"We can do this together, I mean..."

Jessi turns on her boot heels and stares down at her with tired eyes.

"Do what?? Do what exactly. What am I just supposed to go along like that?? I'm sorry but I'm not ready to die yet, even *if* it means I get to live forever or whatever or... Like, what if it lied to us? How are we supposed to trust that... that thing??"

"Don't be rude," Kim rolls her eyes. "You're gonna regret it."

"It's not even human!! Not even remotely!! What's to say it's not just using us for some... you know... something beyond our comprehension??"

"Jessi..." Kim sighs.

"Because I don't even know how we fucking got here in the first place!!"

"Jessi!! *Please*. We can do this together."

"Kim, I..."

"We can make it painless, even. It's like, we can make a whole day out of it, like a trip, you know? We can take some Xanax and vodka, put on like *Koyaanisqatsi* or *Sans Soleil* or something and just doze off or whatever... it could be sweet..."

"Yeah and what if it doesn't like actually work?? What happens when we just stay dead??"

"Jessi..."

"This is fucked, alright?? Okay?? Just admit it. This is fucked."

“After everything we’ve been through?”

“I just... I need a cigarette. Okay?? I need to check my phone.”

They sit at a picnic table beneath a veil of shadow, a spot too dark to see into from the outside. Kim sits on top of the table while Jessi pulls out her phone from the bench. No messages, no notifications.

Jessi feels her lover’s fingers running through her hair.

“You remember how we met??”

“OKCupid?”

“No, before that.”

“Oh right that fucking Dead Congregation show.”

“Yeah it was a really good show.”

“Yeah I think Pissgrave opened or something.”

“God fucking New York.”

After the show they got blackout drunk and passed out in each others arms on a couch somewhere. The night after they fucked for the first time at a Sunn O))) show in a church Greta Gerwig shot parts of *Lady Bird* in. In the confessional.

The memory’s faded now though. Jessi remembers everything except how it used to feel.

A train rumbles by in the distance; cold air blows down the back of Jessi’s black leather jacket, chilling her sweat-soaked shirt back. She remembers laying on the back of the train, on a blanket in a divot in the top of the car. Watching the stars float by away from the cities, her hand in hers. A warm memory. She tries to clutch it in her fingers and it turns to mist.

Kim’s grasp tightens around Jessi’s scalp and she turns lets out a cute little moan. Kim grins deliciously, pulls tighter. Puts a hand around her throat. Pushes her back down onto the table. Mounts her, feels her cock bulge against her jeans zipper, grinds against her taint, sitting comfortably on her pelvis, running her hands up the arms of her black leather jacket, weaving her fingers between hers, pinning her down on the splintered green paint. Goes in for the neck, sucking, biting; Jessi holds her breath, gasps out:

*"You're the one in the sundress..."*

"Fuck you!" she spits in her face, making her gasp breathily. "Besides, when was the last time you got underneath me??" Grabs her hair, pulls her neck back; eyes roll into her head. "I'm sick of letting *you* have all the fun." Unbuckles her belt. Yanks her pants down just below her ass with her panties, so Jessi's semisoft cock bounces gently against her pubes. Pulls up her sundress, pulls her panties down just enough to let her clit out. Starts stroking it, running her hand up Jessi's shirt, gripping her nipple piercing tight between her finger and her thumb. Jessi lets out a gasp, leans her neck back, looking out over the trail from upside down.

*"Fuck, I..."*

Kim spits on her hand twice and lubes her clit up.

*"Yeah?"*

She presses it against Jessi's puckered asshole. Jessi bites her lip and grips the edge of the table.

*"Fuck please I need it fuck. I. I need it."*

Arches back again, traces with her eyes the light out over the trail back towards the bathrooms.

*"Yeah?"*

She feels the tip slipping in, splitting her open. Slips out. Back inside her, with slightly less resistance.

*"Please."*

A shimmering silhouette swaying in the breeze, out by the lake.

*"You poor thing. You're fucking pathetic, you know. So desperate."*

She pulls out, spits on her hand again, rubs her clit, shoves it right back in.

*"Wait, wait fuck..."* She shoves her off her, "*fuck*," feels her pop out her ass, "*shit fuck*."

*"What??"*

*"There's someone out there. I think. Fuck."* Jessi pulls up her pants and panties and stands up so fast she gets all dizzy and nearly passes out, catching herself halfway through fainting just before she eats shit.

"What the fuck are you talking about Jessi??"

"There. I mean I think there's someone out there."

"Where??"

"There."

"Oh."

"You see it??"

"See what??"

"That... Tell me I'm not fucking crazy that's a person right??"

"I'm not sure..." she squints and stares " Yeah no I think it's just, like, a trash can..."

They just stare off in the distance for a second, under the cover of shadow, before Kim heads out from the canopy of trees onto the path. She stares at the shape for a second, hands on her hips, before coming back to tell her: "Yeah. No. That is *literally* just a trash can."

\* \* \*

Jessi went in the woman's room because the dealer's text said she'd find his girl there. He didn't tell her any of this before just now but apparently he was out of town so he was doing all his deals remotely through this girl instead. He said he was sorry but he'd have her throw in some edibles because fuck it or whatever. She could tell he really liked her.

She finds his girl leaning against the grimy far wall past all the vandalized mirrors and the Pepto-Bismol pink stalls. Tapping her foot on the avocado-colored tile. Fluorescent light flickering cold and sickly overhead. A steady drip from the sink, warm smell of decay mingled in with the chemical-smelling automated perfume spray.

Jessi was feeling kind of nervous. She wasn't really planning on the possibility of a surrogate.

"Hey," the girl smiles, gaunt and shaking. Pale and fragile, like a ghost image of a person. Worn out band tee and torn skinny jeans. "You must be uh. You know. Ha ha."

She looks about five years younger than her, bad skin and vibrant slime green acrylic nails and a wardrobe by Shein. Obviously trans. She smells like patchouli. "Well anyways I got the stuff. You wanted two ounces right??"

"Yeah, you see. Ha. That's the funny thing," Jessi says. "I thought it'd just be, like... my usual guy?? Like, uh. This is kind of awkward.... I didn't actually bring any cash."

"Ah ha ha," she says. "Right... Because you were gonna kill him."

"Yeah..."

"So, like. For real though??"

"Yeah I mean ha. More or less..."

"I see," she says. "That is pretty funny."

"I mean. I just don't wanna be weird or let this out so like. I got Venmo??" Jessi clears her throat. She feels her pulse quicken. "I just, like," she sighs. "I don't think I have the money in my account, like. Not *today*. But I can get you tomorrow."

"Oh okay. So. You're not gonna kill me??" the girl says, kind of disappointed.

"What?? Oh. No, no. Fuck no."

"Why not??" she says.

"I mean..." Jessi falters, hears whatever confidence remained in her voice disintegrate.

"Is it because I'm a *girl*??" she smirks.

"Ahhh ha. Ha. No!! I just..."

"How were you gonna do it?? Huh??" she asks, peeling off the wall, coming in close. "You got a gun?? Knife?? Hammer?? Tell me!! Tell me!!" She pulls herself close to her. "Boxcutters?? Blackjack??" Jessi can tell from this close up that she's actually a little bit taller than her, because she has to tilt her head back to maintain eye contact. "Maybe get creative like a drill or one of those cow bolt guns like that guy in that one movie..."

"I, um..."

Jessi doesn't feel the fingers fishing around in her jacket..

“Ah,” she grins.

“Look, I really don’t wanna start any shit,” Jessi says nervously, backing up from her. “I’ve been having kind of a weird day...”

“It’s a shame, you know?? How you’re not gonna kill me.” She licks her lips with a split tongue. “I’ve heard it’s blissful on the other side. And *especially* if a pretty girl like you sent me...” Her fingers find the slide on the utility knife she swiped from Jessi’s jacket.

“Look ha. I don’t wanna start nothing. I’m just gonna go...”

“What’s the matter, sugar??” She grabs her by her spiked jacket collar, gripping tight, pulling her in with one hand, digging Jessi’s fully elongated utility knife deep into her gut. “Afraid of a little death??” It stings like hell, weeping red all through her shirt. “There’s no getting out of it,” Inward and outward: seven stabs in quick succession, rendering Jessi useless. She staggers back, gasping through cut lungs, a thousand needles burning ice inside of her. “It’s like, what’s that people say??” her eyes like fireworks. “As above, so below??” Like it’s really two different states of being.” The girl brings the stained blade to her own throat, extending the breakaway blade all the way, shoving it deep into her jugular; it passes through and upward, threading through her jawbone, tip of the blade sticking out from her mouth. Spraying thin walls of blood all over the green tile floor as she falls to her knees.

\* \* \*

Jessi staggers out the bathroom into the black-orange night shocked and shaking. Kim sees her leaking all over the sidewalk, sticks her book back in her bag and rushes over.

“Jessi what the fuck?? Oh my god what the fuck Jessi holy shit who what *happened??*”

“I’m okay,” Jessi gasps and coughs up a spray of blood. “Ha ha no. No no I’m not okay I’m lying ha ha.”

“What happened??”

“...fucking *stabbed me*, Kim,” Jessi says, falling to her knees. “I’m fucking *slit*.”

“No no no no it’s okay Jessi you’re fine you’re gonna be fine.”

“It’s okay,” she gargles. Every second gets harder and harder to breathe. “I’m gonna be okay,” she gasps.

“Fuck, what the fuck who did this??” Kim struggles to stop the bleeding, gushing up through her palms all over her dress. “Who fucking did this??”

“It’s gonna be okay,” Jessi says.

“I don’t know what to do,” Kim says. “I don’t know what to do. I don’t know where to go from here?? Just please don’t go on me okay??”

“Baby I ain’t never going anywhere,” Jessi smiles through wet ruby teeth. “Don’t you understand? This is forever, you and I.” She grips the retracted utility knife in her black leather jacket tight as her pocket fills up with blood. “We’re just exactly where we both belong.”

DOWNWARD IS  
HEAVENWARD

7th Annual Spiritual Healing Christmas Benefit Concert  
Sluggo's (Pensacola, FL / Dec 25th, 2021)

*1st performance*

Violet

Drain You

Good Sister/Bad Sister

Sappy

Teenage Whore

Scentless Apprentice

Love Buzz (Shocking Blue)

Jennifer's Body

In Bloom

She Walks Over Me

Lithium

Rock Star

Smells Like Teen Spirit

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO — DAY.

*COURTNEY (30) (she/her), trans woman wearing the SCORPION JACKET FROM DRIVE (2011) over a BULLETPROOF VEST, BURSTS THROUGH DOOR TO STUDIO carrying a STONER 63 MACHINE GUN.*

COURTNEY: *(gunshots)* GET THE FUCK DOWN!!! NOW!!! *(studio crew screams off-camera)* NOT YOU— *(coughs)* sorry, what's your name?? *(Kathleen Hanna stutters name)* Oh~! *(delighted)* What a coincidence. *(smiling)* I kill rock stars. *(shoots Kathleen Hanna) (imitating Nelson from The Simpsons)* HA HA!!! *(screaming erupts off-camera)* HEY Y'ALL SHUT!!! THE FUCK!!! UP!!! OKAY??? KEEP ROLLING. *(saunters over corpse)* Jesus. Everyone dies. Ain't that special. *(waves hands) (mutters under breath)*

*KURT (27) (he/they), femboy wearing BLACK TRENCHCOAT DOC MARTENS, FOLLOWS behind her, AIMING his DOUBLE BARRELED SHOTGUN at the CAMERA OPERATORS, DIRECTOR and CREW. A pair of GIMPS CARRY their EQUIPMENT through the door, start UNLOADING as the STUDIO CREW continues to RECORD.*

COURTNEY: Gosh, I, *(looks around)* I just love these flowers, what a nice, womanly touch, very yonic, very nostalgic... Can we turn the lights... more yellow? *(lights shift )* Like... You ever seen "Piss Christ"? *(lights change)* Yeahhh... that's it... Perfect. *(brushing hair out of eyes)* Someone drag this bitch's body out of here? *(scratches arm)* Really killing my vibe... *(twitching)* Alright... *(snickers)* Y'all still rolling?? Y'all ready for something real special?

*NEW YORK S.W.A.T. TEAM KICK DOWN the DOOR to the STUDIO, OPENING FIRE on them. BULLETS TEAR THEIR BODIES TO SHREDS; BLOOD and GUTS SPLATTER WALLS.*

The terrorist attack on was all Courtney's idea. A quick Google search shows her the studio they shot MTV Unplugged in New York; from there it isn't hard to find all the blueprints, schematics, etc. She starts planning their method of attack. *How do you go about such a hijacking?* Trial and error, mostly. Cocaine was a necessity to stay awake past the third night long enough to follow through with the plan. Fall asleep past the 27th and wake up back on Christmas morning. Fuck all that. They'd gone too far to give up now. So. They need drugs to stay awake, and Courtney knows just how to get them. Kurt's still got all that money in savings. Her mom's wallet always has exactly \$606.17 dollars in it, and the drug dealer she almost always buys from on the 26th has another \$65,000 in cash in his safe. She knows the combination from holding him at gunpoint once. The dealer pissed himself as he scrawled it out on a page torn out from a copy of DMT: The Spirit Molecule and he shat himself just before she shot him in the face.

She only had to do this once. But sometimes she'd just hold him up for fun.

She knows this works because they've done all this three times already, as a proof of concept. Each time they get a little bit further. Every time they die, they learn something new. There are so many factors to cover. Thankfully, Courtney has friends on the dark web and connections in New York— a handful of chasers on some real *Uncut Gems* shit. She knows \$25,000 is enough to buy anything. It's just a matter of knowing who she should pay for what.

This time around Kathleen Hanna survives the first gunshot so Kurt finishes her off with his pocket knife. He delights in her terror as he disembowels her. Cutting up her body feels like clay. It's all very inconsequential. Probably because he's done this one before. A steaming rainbow of guts and fluids fall on her lap. The crew tries to run at the sight of her guts but they both already account for this because this happened one time they tried this. The doors are welded shut. This time

around Courtney finally got what she always wanted: an intimate, beautiful performance committed to high-definition video. Just the two of them and a drum machine. Viscera aside, it was all very sweet and intimate. It made Kurt feel warm and tingly on the inside. Eventually the show would remind Courtney of Ween and she would come to hate it.

She would later consider this a part of her “edgy phase” and look back on with regret.

She knew she wasn’t gonna live past today (she felt so very tired, having been awake now for nearly 96 hours) but maybe, just maybe, if this reality moved on in her absence, someone else might see her face up on a

INT. COURTNEY’S ROOM — DAY.

*The CEILING FAN HUMS above them as it ROTATES SLOWLY like a U.F.O. A phone VIBRATES on the table, PLAYING the song “1979” by the Smashing Pumpkins. The screen reads “08:00”. COURTNEY opens her eyes and starts SCREAMING, violently waking KURT. COURTNEY’S MOM rushes into the room.*

COURTNEY’S MOM: Sug’?? Y’all okay in there??

COURTNEY: (getting out of bed)  
GrrrrRRRRRAH1HGHGGGGHGH  
aHahahahaHAHAHAHAhAHhA . . . (grinning)

COURTNEY’S MOM: (concerned) Baby?? I—

*COURTNEY grabs her bass guitar lying by the side of the bed and SMASHES it into COURTNEY’S MOM’s HEAD. Her skull CAVES IN beneath a SQUISHED BRUISE, LEAKING BRAIN MATTER; BASS GUITAR STRINGS VIBRATE & RATTLE in HARMONY.*

COURTNEY: (*shrill screaming*) FFFFFFFUCK! FUCK! FUCK!  
FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!  
FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!  
FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!

*COURTNEY'S MOM lies WRITHING. BLOOD SPURTS from newly formed fissures in her skull. COURTNEY HOVERS over her, brings her 1974 LEFT-HANDED RICKENBACKER 4001c64 UP then DOWN on COURTNEY'S MOM'S SKULL, SQUISHING it into a BLACKENED PUDDLE of MEAT and BONE. COURTNEY'S MOM'S BODY TWITCHES gently, GASPING through newly formed FISSURES in her WINDPIPE.*

COURTNEY: (*unintelligible*)

INT. HALLWAY — DAY.

*COURTNEY STORMS out from her room, SWINGING her SPLINTERED 1974 LEFT-HANDED RICKENBACKER 4001c64 at the FAMILY PORTRAITS on the wall, her BABY PICTURES, OLD PHOTOGRAPHS OF DECEASED RELATIVES, all the ANGELIC FIGURINES lining WOODEN WAL-MART SHELVING, SMASHING them into DUST.*

COURTNEY: (*screaming continues*)

COURTNEY'S DAD: (*approaching*) Now just what is going on here?

*COURTNEY STRIKES COURTNEY'S DAD with her BUSTED UP 1974 LEFT-HANDED RICKENBACKER 4001c64; it BURSTS into fragments and dust upon contact with his LEFT TEMPLE, RUPTURING BLOOD, SKIN and SPLINTERS like a firework, or a pipe bomb. COURTNEY'S DAD STUMBLES to the CULTURALLY APPROPRIATIVE RUG on the carpet, REACHING for the GASH.*

COURTNEY drops the DETACHED NECK OF 1974 LEFT-HANDED RICKENBACKER 4001c64 and MOUNTS COURTNEY'S DAD.

COURTNEY'S DAD: (*muffled wheezing, labored breath*)

COURTNEY REACHES for COURTNEY'S DAD's NECK; COURTNEY'S DAD STRUGGLES, CLAWING at COURTNEY'S ARMS as her hands GRIP AROUND COURTNEY'S DAD's skull. GRINNING, DROOLING, COURTNEY PLUNGES her thumbs into COURTNEY'S DAD's eye sockets, PIERCING HIS CORNEAS.

COURTNEY'S DAD: (*agonized*) —...h...y... (*gags*)

COURTNEY DIGS her thumbs deeper, GRIPPING his cheeks, until COURTNEY'S DAD's WEEPING FACE becomes STILL and SILENT.

COURTNEY: (*panting*)

KURT WATCHES at COURTNEY from the doorway.

COURTNEY: (*catches breath*) Okay. Okay. (*exhales*) I feel a lot better now. (*gasps*) It's okay. (*shaking*) It's gonna be okay. (*stands up*) We can make it all okay. Ha ha. We can just start over. Ha ha. (*limps towards the kitchen*) Let's just ALL (*gestures*) forget about *this* okay? (*smiles*)

INT. KITCHEN — DAY.

COURTNEY REACHES under the SINK and pulls out a GALLON OF CLOROX. KURT WATCHES COURTNEY TWIST the CHILD-PROOF SEAL and CHUG FROM THE BOTTLE

COURTNEY: (*gagging*) Haha, fuck. (*retching*) See ya, what. (*coughing*) Seven minutes ago? (*heaving, turning blue*) Ugh. (*vomits profusely*) BLEARGH. (*dies*)

*KURT stares over the MESS, SIGHS. KURT walks to the KNIFE BLOCK on the KITCHEN COUNTER. He takes a KNIFE out from the KNIFE BLOCK and SLITS HIS THROAT. BLOOD SPRAYS out onto the MARBLE COUNTERTOPS. KURT DIES.*

They're halfway up to New York (again) in Courtney's gray Volvo. Kurt pulls Nevermind from the CD wallet and slides it into the console. "*Seriously?*" Courtney groans, "Don't it ever get old?" As if she wasn't the sort of cliché Kurt modeled himself after. "Nothing gets old." He turns up the volume to drown her out.

The nerve on her. Their first date she'd told him a story how, when she was 13, she'd saved up coins she'd find around her high school to buy a copy of In Utero off the clearance rack at the Best Buy right next to Pensacola Junior College for \$5; the "clean" version, the only discernible differences being the obfuscation of the fetus collage on the back of the case and the retitling of track 4 to "Waif Me". She'd always told that story her first time meeting people at parties. She said that album changed her life.

Kurt goes back to reading the copy of Drawing Down The Moon he'd always steal out of the dealer's house. There was something about the repetition of the song he found comforting, even if he didn't really "grow up" with it. When he was 13 his favorite bands were Creed and Underøath.

No, Kurt didn't really listen to grunge outside of diegetic contexts until he met Courtney at that Butthole Surfers set at Day for Night in Houston. Kurt came to see Aphex Twin and Arca; Courtney came to see SOPHIE and Björk. That first night, in this very car; she played him Mudhoney for the first time on her tape deck and finger fucked him to The Wipers.

It felt like an eternity ago because it was, technically speaking, a little less than an eternity ago. Still, he longed to feel even a fraction what he felt that night: held, consumed, devoured, completely. She felt so perfect inside him. Like making love to a reflection. Their bodies became extensions of each other. Whatever happened to them?

He had to think himself in circles to make sense of anything anymore. Like an article in Rolling Stone or Vice. Too much time had passed.

Kurt was an unrepentant goth in high school, especially once he stopped believing in god. While Courtney's late teenage brain was obsessing over In Utero and Live Through This, Kurt's was sulking about over Around the Fur and The Queen is Dead. "There is a Light that Never Goes Out" always used to come up on his Walkman just as the buses would pull through the gates of the school, and he'd remember something his English teacher used to always say when he was teaching Slaughterhouse-Five: "Everyone dies alone." Kurt knew this wasn't always true, and tried to call him out on it. He knew this not just because of The Smiths but also because everybody in the nineties already knew some way or another about how Kurt and Courtney died.

What he wished he'd said back then was something like: Some things last forever, and death was one of them. Very few people had the pleasure or privilege to die by another. So naturally a double suicide seemed transcendently romantic. At least, that's how they felt imagining it. He closed his eyes and pictured them taking each other by the hand for one last dive into the Mississippi River. He thought it seemed sweet if just a little bit too morbid.

Kurt never watched any of the documentaries or TV specials. He refused to read Heavier than Heaven or that Poppy Z. Brite book. Everything he learned was secondhand via Rolling Stone or tabloids, and he never trusted any of those sources! These were conspiracists, the kind of career assholes who'd called Courtney Love a "crack whore" and Kurt Cobain a "closet-case junkie", because those are the kinds of headlines that *sell*. He didn't buy into *any* of those narratives. He could smell the bullshit all over it. Same kind of garbage as Maynard James Keenan getting his ribs removed to suck his own dick or Rod Stewart with the stomach pump: recess playground freakshow sensationalism, deeply entrenched in misogyny, hyperbole, and homophobia. He

wanted to believe in their romanticism, the versions of them that inspired their final and best albums, the versions of them that sang on each other's songs (Kurt Cobain provided backing vocals on "Softer, Softest" and "Asking for It"; Courtney Love did the same for In Utero's "Sappy").

He did understand, however, from what he gathered, that there was an element of mystery to the proceedings. They'd filmed their double suicide (Everyone's seen the footage! They rified on it on Family Guy!), and while Courtney's body was recovered in hours, Kurt's was never found. Famously, Bob Mould would literally fish his shoes out from the Mississippi River five months later, but that was it. Gone. Vanished.

All Kurt could gather from his thoughts was: He didn't wanna die alone. He looks at her sour face staring out the same bullshit traffic on the interstate. He finds solace in knowing no matter whatever happens to them he'll still find himself waking up right beside her.

"A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL. A DENIAL."

INT. SLUGGO'S.

A VEGAN DIVE BAR, DECORATED FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

TINSEL and STREAMERS dangle from the WHITE PANELED CEILING; RAINBOW STRING LIGHTS loop around YELLOW WALLS and FRAMED PAINTINGS. DRINK GLASSES hang BRIGHTLY above the BAR as TATTOOED FEMINISTS PULL TAPS and TAKE ORDERS over JAR OF LIES, a local Alice in Chains cover band (currently playing "Would?"). Two SERVERS RUN ORDERS; all proceeds to charity.

SMUG HIPSTER: (*same stupid thing they always ask*)

COURTNEY: FIRST OF ALL. (*sips beer*) FUCK NO. I'M NOT FUCKING GOING THERE!

FLORAL SLEEVES: (*insists, "politely"*)

COURTNEY: UGHH (*leans on bar*) OKAY, FINE. YOU ALWAYS DO THIS. I'LL GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT? (*laughs*) AN *EXAMPLE*? RIGHT? (*clears throat*) OK, LET'S FUCKING GO! IF YOU *REALLY* WANT TO! (*chugs beer, gasps*) SO! FOR INSTANCE! YOU REMEMBER HOW, FEW YEARS BACK, J.K. ROWLING FUCKING KILLED HERSELF? WASN'T THAT COOL?

BARTENDER: (*interrupting*) 'SCUSE ME, (*gesturing*) CAN WE CLEAR THE BAR?? I GOT A LOT OF PEOPLE WAITING TO GET SERVED.

COURTNEY: (*apologetic*) SORRY MY BAD... ANYWAYS... (*cringes, leaves bar*)

*They HEAD OUT onto the SIDEWALKS. KURT FOLLOWS.*

EXT. SLUGGO'S — NIGHT.

*COURTNEY sparks a JOINT. It's SNOWING, BARELY.*

WOMAN WITH DOG: *(smiling)* Now that ain't something you see every day.

COURTNEY: *(jaded)* Yea yea yea, you always say that... *(sighs)*

WOMAN WITH DOG: So much for global warming, huh! *(laughs)*

COURTNEY: *(snidely)* Yea, uh huh, sure. *(scoffs)* Idiot. *(under her breath)* Always snows on Christmas.

KURT: *(sighs)*

COURTNEY: *(tuts)* Anyways, where was I. Right. The J.K. Rowling suicide. *(takes a drag)* Only good thing she ever done.

*KURT STARES OFF.*

COURTNEY: Let me explain something though. *(clears throat)* When that *bitch* deprived us dolls the *pleasure* of offing her ourselves. *(coughs)* Y'all already know how that shit went down. There was speculation she was murdered, right?? Of course there was! Always *gotta* be someone to blame. And of course all the TERFs turned and point the finger at *us*. And then there was all the backlash! And all those awful laws! All because a couple queers got caught taking pictures! But! But! *(sips beer)* Few years later. There were *some people* who wanted to reclaim her, as some kind of martyr for people that never transitioned. You remember that shit?? *All the speculation*. And I mean, yes, sure, there were a lot of convincing arguments!! You know?? I mean, all the books she published

under Robert Galbraith, secretly publishing under a *male name*... (escalating) then you got Harry Potter, *the character*, a textbook case of wish fulfillment. Think about it! Broke, homeless boy gets discovered, lives a miserable childhood he constantly leverages for sympathy, gets told he's the most important person who's ever lived, gets a billion dollars from *nothing*, then grows up to be the most important cop that's ever lived?? There's a LOT to read into there. And then! Then! ...God, what was that blog post? (*takes out phone*) One second...

*A BEAT.*

COURTNEY: (*reading from phone*) "The more of their accounts of gender dysphoria I've read, with their insightful descriptions of anxiety, dissociation, eating disorders, self-harm and self-hatred, the more I've wondered whether, if I'd been born 30 years later, I too might have tried to transition. [...] If I'd found community and sympathy online that I couldn't find in my immediate environment, I believe I could have been persuaded to turn myself into the son my father had openly said he'd have preferred." *Wow*. All that from a writer who killed herself. (*exasperated*) Really makes you think. (*pants*)

*COURTNEY PAUSES for a RESPONSE that NEVER COMES. SHE NOTICES KURT has wandered off.*

COURTNEY: Point being! Just. (*sips beer*) Put all that shit out of mind! Because I don't think transition would've made her any less *vile*. Transition wouldn't have stopped her from being rich or a cunt. It wouldn't have knocked that fucking chip off her shoulder. I mean, (*chuckles*) just look at Caitlyn Jender. (*snorts*) "Jender". Fuck ha ha whoops. (*sips beer*) Ah well. Who really cares? None of it really fucking matters. (*shrugs*) At least we got some cool album art out of it.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Courtney is referring to short-lived all-trans Jacksonville goregrind band Weekend Sex Change, known for their

*TRANS-EXTERMINATED RADICAL FEMINIST split with queer powerviolence duo Assigned Cunt At Birth; the controversial 7" featured an unaltered photograph of the Rowling suicide on their side, and her exhumed & defiled grave on the other, spurning retaliation from the notorious Order of the Phoenix, a white supremacist organization modeled after early manuscripts for the penultimate Harry Potter novel unearthed after Rowling's death, culminating in the explosion of two of the band member's touring vans. Only the white supremacists were injured.]*

COURTNEY: I'm not really sure what I'm getting at, because Kurt Cobain wasn't (*air quotes*) "problematic" in the same ways as J.K. Rowling. But, I think it speaks to the same desire?? People just *love* trying to make up some narrative that fits; they want *reasons*. But! This is the REAL WORLD. Sometimes someone just hates themselves and wants to die. Whether or not they're *trans* doesn't really have nothing to do with that. And people like to conflate *us* with suicide, because it's convenient! It feeds into both transphobic and trans-affirming narratives: Oh, you killed yourself? Shouldn't have transitioned. Oh, you killed yourself? Should've have transitioned. (*finishes beer*) That's why I think we should throw that kind of thinking in the fucking trash. Because guess what? Some people just spend all their life wanting to fucking die! Transition. isn't some fucking miracle cure for depression! That urge is still gonna be there, regardless of taxonomies. (*tipsy*) I guess what I'm trying to say is, I'm sick of it! I mean, you could play *this game* forever with *anyone* you find tragic. Because, what, that's the common thread with us trannies, right?? (*slurs*) *Tragedy*?? (*snickers*) It's all projection!! And you see?? (*grinning*) That's the thing!! None of you fuckers even realize when you're doing it! Maybe you? C'mon!! I've seen the Reddit threads. And it's always the same fucking story!! Elliott Smith!! Jeff Buckley!! Sufjan Stevens!! "Would transition have saved her??"... And it's always "her," too... as if enbys don't exist... But you wouldn't say that about someone *alive*, would you? Not unless they got

long hair and nail polish and anything else you stereotype as *female*. I mean, just take a look at Eddie Vedder: Long hair, critical of toxic masculinity, *miserable*... but he's never been, I dunno, a Harry Styles type, right?? No one's gonna speculate like maybe Eddie Vedder would be happier in a dress because he doesn't fit in with what people consider as *feminine*. He's too *rough*. But!! Maybe if he offed himself?? Blew his fuckin' head off?? Because then the "hysteric suicidal psuedo-tranny" narrative fits there. Because men are allowed to be angry because they're *rational* but *women can't think* and *suicide* is for *crazy people*. Explain to me how any of that makes any fucking sense!! I mean. Is that what you want, you fucking sickos?? More suicide?? Here's the thing though, (*gestures*) these are *real people we're talking about*. Okay?? *Actual flesh and blood human beings*, just the same as you and me. You can't just apply or modify or *create* narratives where convenient, that's not fucking fair!! If Sufjan Stevens were still alive, the fuck you think he'd have to say about all those Tumblr lyric dissections circa 2017?? IT'S FUCKING EMBARRASSING!! Those people are dead!! Fucking *gone*!! There's nothing to save here, and no one can speak for themselves. The best we can do is remain agnostic. Because it's just gonna get *way* too messy if we ever start speculating about that kind of shit!! (*groans*) Do any of you even know what I'm fucking *talking about*?? WHATEVER. (*shivers*) I feel like I'm just talking to a mirror, because, you know?? *Ain't none of you got the proper context to even understand what I'm talking about*; I swear none of y'all *ever* do. It's *always* like this. I fucking swear. Because none of you ever *remember* anything I tell ya. I don't even know why I try to get into it in the first place!! *I'm fucking sick of it*. Talking in goddamn circles. I'm fucking sick of talking in goddamn circles.

*COURTNEY TAKES a REVOLVER from her PURSE and BLOWS her BRAINS OUT.*

Live the same 3 days over and over again forever and eventually figure out where to find everything. Kurt and Courtney both knew plenty of gun nuts around town, and they discovered plenty more in their adventures. Marky had an RPG and a truck bed full of rockets he'd take out in the woods in the summer and shoot at deer. Sharon & Sherice had a stockpile of napalm and flamethrowers. Bobby collected and restored World War II-era munitions. Thomas collected sniper rifles and made Kevlar trench coats. Paulie sold grenades on the down-low out the back of his fireworks truck and kept them in a shed in his backyard. They had more options than they knew what to do with them.

Like so much of what they did, they started killing cops as a joke. They figured, why the hell not? So much time had passed since their first time through Christmas 2021. Nothing ever changes. Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Fall asleep and wake up together in her again. Over and over, until the endless succession of days bled into each other like bad shoe gaze. Kurt knew relatively temperate but chilly Florida winter nights would never get any warmer. 2022 would never come for them. This right now was all they had left to look forward to. The same sweater weather, foggy streets and Christmas lights. Over and over. So it goes. Courtney's dad is glued to the 24 hour Christmas Story marathon. Courtney's mom is well-meaning and supportive, but ultimately problematic, in ways neither of them could ever quite put into words. Nothing here would ever change.

Kurt's thinking about this on the roof of Pensacola Christian College's indoor swimming pool. They shot rockets and threw bombs down at all the cop cars and watched them explode in a brilliant, shimmering shower of orange and gold and red and black. Fireworks. Up here, so distant from the killing, Kurt lost connection with his body. He drifted out upward from the back of his head and watched himself walking back and forth, popping up from cover, raining a hail of bullets from a machine gun onto a crowd of National Guard. Courtney brought her

dad's cassette deck; Big Black's Atomizer blares from the punchy little speakers. Steve Albini chants: "NEVER ANYTHING TO DO IN THIS TOWN," explosion below, gunfire, "LIVE HERE MY WHOLE LIFE." The song sounds like he's hearing it from another room over. Bodies popping off, flailing, slumping into piles of meat and blood. Rip and tear, snapping bone, agonizing screams beneath them. Smells like copper. From this height Kurt can see his nose running from the cold, but his hands aren't shaking. Matter of fact, he's quite calm. Statuesque, even. Everything zen. Right up 'til the drones come bomb them to smithereens.

INT. COURTNEY'S ROOM — DAY.

*The CEILING FAN HUMS above them as it ROTATES SLOWLY like a U.F.O. A phone VIBRATES on the table, PLAYING the song “1979” by the Smashing Pumpkins. The screen reads “08:00”.*

*KURT GETS OUT OF BED and GETS DRESSED.*

INT. KITCHEN — DAY.

*COURTNEY'S MOM sets the table. Vintage 70's dining set and furniture, warped and smudged over years of use and exposure to humidity. Outside is GRAY AND COLD; 13 degrees Celsius. COURTNEY'S DAD can be seen watching A Christmas Story on the TV in the living room; he KNOWS and RECITES every line. KURT BUTTERS HIS GRITS, SIPS COFFEE, EATS EGGS.*

*COURTNEY'S MOM: (Says something he's already heard literally thousands of times before, word for word. Since this is always her first time saying it, she says it with exactly the same intonation and inflection as she always does. She smiles.)*

*COURTNEY WALKS IN through the DOOR.*

KURT: Hey, um. Thank you. For breakfast. It's very good. Always.

COURTNEY'S MOM: (*surprised*) Oh! Of course! You're part of the family you know? You're like the d— you're like the *son* we never really had.

KURT: Ha. (*happy*) Thanks. Thank you. Ha. That's, uh. That's really sweet of you.

*COURTNEY ROLLS HER EYES.*

KURT: And, uhm. Merry Christmas.

*COURTNEY SITS AT TABLE.*

COURTNEY'S MOM: (*excited*) Oh—! I... (*glowing*) Well. (*cheerily*) Merry Christmas to you as well. (*smiling*)

*COURTNEY TAKES the FORK laid out for her. She GOUGES AWAY at her NECK REPEATEDLY, SPEWING BLOOD OVER their BREAKFAST.*

COURTNEY'S MOM: (*shocked, appalled*) COURTNEY—!!!

Courtney was grateful they'd opened their presents the night before. At least they'd only have to do that shit once. Some flannel; coats; DVDs; novelty socks; a hardcover volume of Junji Ito. A lockpick; a pocket knife (both which would come in handy); Tickets to Disney World they still hadn't used because December is just way too fucking cold to wanna be outside all fucking day even in Florida.

Courtney's dad bought them an ounce of weed. That was awful nice of him.

By now they'd been smoking so often they didn't even notice when they were smoking. It was always there, it never ran out. It weaved in and out the patchwork of their life like embroidery. Courtney's parents were both very cool about it.

Kurt didn't have any parents. Not anymore. His dad died shortly after he was conceived, and Kurt's mom kicked him out when she caught him doing DIY HRT.

When she died a few summers ago, she left him quite a bit of money, as her only living relative. He'd been living off that money since then. Dying was the nicest thing she'd ever done for him. He went from sleeping on couches to renting an apartment, from hitching rides to owning a bike, from being uninsured to getting his surgery, and he still had more money than he knew what to do with.

He was supposed to pay for Courtney's surgery, too. Shame, they were only a few months away from the date. He'd already booked a hotel in Thailand and everything.

Kurt knew now Courtney might never live to see 31. He should've been more insistent about paying for it earlier. He hated himself for holding out on her, even if she was the one who had turned him down the first time he offered her money. Still, it was an awkward situation to be stuck

in. Kurt suspected it was the reason Courtney hadn't fucked him in so very long. Goddamn vagina envy.

One day, after they got bored of all the cop killing, Kurt asked Courtney if she wanted anything else for Christmas, since she probably wouldn't be getting that pussy for a while. She smiled and said, jokingly, "I wanna kill Axl Rose."

"Well. We have all the time in the world."

So eventually, after some trial and error, Courtney killed Axl Rose in his \$150 million dollar mansion in Malibu. She had this delicious look on her face as she reinvented him as a corpse. Kurt was jealous. Courtney looked so hot covered in all that blood. He wanted to impress her. So they shot Louis C.K. in his \$2.45 million dollar apartment in Greenwich Village. They blew his dick off with a Magnum while he was jacking off in the shower, then watched him bleed out crying like a baby on the bathroom tile. He thought this might turn Courtney on enough to finally fuck him, considering how wet Axl Rose's death had made her, but it only turned her competitive. She broke into Woody Allen's Manhattan Townhouse and made him watch her carve the heart out of his chest and watch her eat it. Kurt now saw the artistic potential in their killing. Lower in expression, or whatever. So he disemboweled Jeffree Star and hung him with his entrails from the chandelier of his \$20 million dollar mansion in Hidden Hills, California. He left "Chandelier" by Sia playing on a loop as he left. He laughed about it for three days straight. It was a stupid joke—more of a pun than a joke, really—but it was the first thing he had laughed about in a very long time. Of course, this made Courtney realize the comedic possibility of their violence. She dropped a cross on Chris Pratt during Sunday Service at Hillside Church, popping his head like a cherry, spraying blood and brain matter all over his congregation. Inspired, Kurt tracked Gallagher down to a motel in North Carolina and bust his head open with a mallet like a watermelon. It splattered deliciously. Courtney,

however, found it cheap and uninspiring. She found Ben Shapiro in Boca Raton, knocked him on the back of the head, tied him up and tucked him in the trunk of a rental Mini Cooper. Crushed him in the car crusher. Kurt felt stupid; why hadn't he thought to kill Ben Shapiro? Of all the people, *that little shit*. Sure, he could give it a go now, but it wouldn't feel as fresh. So he drove to Trey Parker's mountain retreat in Colorado. Trey was on a weeklong acid bender with Matt Stone while screen. Their evil was enough to make headlines. Surely some morbid teenager would write a blog about their performance.

On the way down the stairwell, she slips on a puddle of spilled coffee and tumbles backwards down 3 flights of stairs, twisting her neck in a complete 180 along the way, landing limp and motionless in a pile by a fire extinguisher. Kurt sighs and pulls the pins on the grenades strapped across his dress.

South Park was on hiatus; they had plenty of time to fuck with his twin victims. He remembers saying “Oh my God, I killed Kenny!” right after killing the voice of Kenny. It felt good in the moment but he felt empty the morning after. Courtney mocked him for this. Said it was weakness or some dumb shit. Really she was jealous and upset with herself for not thinking to kill those assholes first. So she considered for a while which celebrities she hated the most. She had a giant novelty dildo bat as a pre-order bonus for Saints Row: The Third from way back in 2011. Three Fridays later she drove up to Eminem’s \$1.5 million dollar mansion in Michigan and beat him to death with that giant novelty dildo bat, just because she wanted to.

They went on back and forth like this for a while.

INT. COURTNEY'S GRAY VOLVO — NIGHT.

*ACCELERATING down the INTERSTATE.*

COURTNEY: Look, now you don't need to worry your pretty femboy head about none of this. All these bitches got it coming to 'em.

KURT: But like. I don't even know who these people are?

COURTNEY: Let me explain something to you, Kurt. Every now and then they pick a trans woman on the internet and decide they're gonna kill her. These... *fuckers...* (*inhales*) If they'd just keep their mouth shut. But no. They JUST *gotta* vanish someone off the face of the fucking planet...

KURT: It's just... I don't get it?

COURTNEY: It's real simple, Kurt. When you're trans on the internet there's just certain things you ain't allowed to write about.

KURT: Like, I mean. I get that. But I know about the story, I read up on that, and I don't think they should've bullied her into detransitioning, but! I dunno! Was that really even their fault? I think, like, some of these people had some valid concerns, considering what they did and didn't know at the time—

COURTNEY: (*interrupting*) Stop. Don't you even—

KURT: I just—

COURTNEY: Just *shut the fuck up* for a second, you transmisogyny exempt little piece of shit. There's just some shit you ain't never gonna understand. OK? You still got a lot of privilege in this world. But! When you're transfeminine like *me*, (*switching lanes*) there's certain social

expectations everyone expects you to meet. You're supposed to make yourself all small, petite, beautiful, sweet, submissive, (*lights joint*) everything all the scumfuck *men* in *this world* think *women* ought to be. (*puffs joint*) No matter if you're trans or whatever, (*passes joint*) women just ain't allowed to be angry in a contemporary sexist capitalist society. They really ain't allowed to feel too strongly about *anything*. That's why we used to be so quick as a country to lobotomize our housewives. Emotion *invalidates* our femininity. (*coughs*) Makes us "bad mothers". Psychotic, even. It's all *very* ableist... I mean, how many times have you ever heard a joke where the punchline's someone's on the rag? No, only men are allowed to get angry, because they're the only ones that know what to do with that. So that means if a trans woman's angry, people are gonna start treating her like a man. You feel me?

*KURT HITS JOINT, CHUGS from BOTTLE OF MOUNTAIN DEW.*

COURTNEY: Like, if you're raised in America, (*puffs joint*) you're raised in a world that teaches you how to be a cop from the day you're fucking born. I mean, just think about what was popular when you were a kid! You know what the highest-grossing game franchise is in the United States?

KURT: I dunno... Uh. Grand Theft Auto?

COURTNEY: GTA's from the UK, hon'. (*scoffs*) No. Call of Duty. Motherfucking war propaganda-ass Call of fucking Duty. And every movie's a fucking superhero movie doubling as cop propaganda. *All of them!* They all believe in this cowboy justice and goodness and comradery that just don't exist outside a communist *or* anarchist contexts. They teach you to pick a favorite cop: Batman, Wonder Woman, Spider-Man, whatever. Same bullshit. We haven't come anywhere since Watchmen! Same fucking dogshit high school politics. Everyone wants to be better than everyone else, everyone wants to *prove it*, and they think that includes jailing the "bad ones," even if it means

exile and death. Well. (*smirks*) There ain't no changing none of that that now. (*laughs*) Point being. As a woman, I feel like it is *my inalienable right* to express how I feel. (*ironically*) I mean, this is "America". Like. Don't be such a pussy. This is *such a gift*, what we have right here, together. All the time in the world. (*snorts cocaine from fingernail while taking exit*) You know, like, none of this really matters. No one ever stays dead. I dunno. Maybe we'll wake up on the 28th someday, like, "Aw fuck, whoops! Shouldn't have killed Elon Musk!" (*chortles*) Maybe. I don't give a shit any more. All I'm saying is, this is the only way I get to express my anger anymore. No point to making any art if it doesn't fucking stay. I just wanna get it all out of my system while I can.

As Courtney's monologue dragged on, Kurt zoned out to the slow chord progression on "Something in the Way". He didn't get it back then, but he finally understood why people always used to say Kurt killed Courtney.

Such an accusation seemed preposterous to his teenage brain. All those whispers Kurt Cobain was *actually* gay, or at the very least bi, that Kurt was trying to get a divorce, that he paid El Duce \$50,000 to off her and fake his death, that he killed his wife and abandoned his only child to become a "transvestite porn star". None of these narratives seemed like they could've been true, considering their absurdity, but thinking back on the lyrics to their respective band's latter-day work, he couldn't help but wonder if it was true, and he couldn't help but wonder if Courtney really had been taking advantage of him. She told him something the other night...

Was it months?

Years?

Kurt had lost all concept of time.

Regardless; he remembered now, it was right after they'd killed Jimmy Urine. Courtney decided they could always kill the writers later. She could tell Kurt was feeling conflicted, and she really didn't want him to fuck it up for her. They took advantage of the fact Courtney knew on the 29th, at 10:37 PM, Jimmy Urine would pick up underage girls off the corner of 53rd & 3rd, and Courtney knew even at 30 she could still pass for jailbait with the right clothes and makeup. She remembered the fear in that faggot's eyes, the way he called her various racial slurs like he was waiting on a laugh track to punctuate his epithets. She tied him up, shot ketamine up his ass and set a boa constrictor on him.

“What’s the matter, Jimmy? Can’t take a joke? Too *tight* for ya?” Eyes bursting from his stupid purple head.

That night, Courtney wrapped herself around Kurt. He could feel the warmth of her dick on the inside of their thigh, her head rubbing his clit through the fabric of their panties. Just before he loses consciousness, she whispers in his ear: “No one else is ever gonna love you like I love you. No one could ever hold you so close, and no one ever will. There’s only us left now.”

EXT. DECIMATED RUINS OF MAR-A-LAGO — DAY

*The air is thick with ASH and DECAY. BODIES, LIMBS, GORE SCATTERED OVER THE RUINS, WOOD and WIRE and METAL and CONCRETE and DUST. KURT WANDERS through the MEAT/DEBRIS, CORPSES DUSTED WHITE, FROZEN STARES.*

[ED: the names of the dead are too numerous to list here.]

COURTNEY: Beautiful. Just. *(teary-eyed)* Beautiful. *(pulls dick out from through leg of jean shorts, starts jacking off)* Ha. Ha ha.

KURT: *(incredulous)* Seriously?

COURTNEY: *(grinning)* I'm sorry, I uhh... *(laughs)* I just couldn't help myself...

KURT: Jesus Courtney, what is *wrong* with you?

COURTNEY: *(mockingly)* "What is wrong with you?" *(scoffs)* What is wrong with *US*. *DON'T YOU GET IT?* We're *sick*. Filth! Fucked in the head! Evil!

KURT: Then why the fuck don't you ever just *fuck* me?

COURTNEY: *(yelling)* BECAUSE YOU *NEVER FUCKING ASK*.

KURT: *(visibly hurt)* MAYBE I DON'T WANT TO? MAYBE, I DUNNO, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ROMANCE? WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SWEEPING ME OFF MY FEET?

COURTNEY: Whatever happened to consent?!?!?

KURT: *(sighs)* Okay, fine! *Maybe* I don't wanna hafta consent! *Maybe* I

just want you to, fucking, you know, just *do* whatever the *fuck* you want to me! (*shamed*) God, *ugh*, I'm so fucking pathetic.

COURTNEY: GOOD. (*moans*) Go on. (*jacking off intensifies*) Tell me *exactly* just how pathetic you are.

KURT: *Fuck you!*

*SIRENS BLARE off in the distance. The ASHEN SKY PULSES GENTLY PINK AND BLUE.*

COURTNEY: Do what you want Kurt, I'll be right over here. Just doin' me! (*chuckles nervously*) I don't give a shit. I'm gonna... I'm gonna jack off on Kellyanne Conway's entrails. (*anxious*) I'm gonna do a big cumshot on Rick Scott's stupid fucking charred Voldemort skull and cum in Ron DeSantis' ass using blood as lube. (*laughs*) I don't give a fuck anymore, dude! (*snorts, teeth clench*) This is the only way I get off anymore!

KURT: Shut up. Just. (*confused*) Shut the fuck up.

COURTNEY: (*smug*) Make me, faggot. C'mon then!

KURT: (*grabs her hair*) Down. (*shoves her down on knees*) Did I say you could stop fucking touching yourself? (*unzips pants*)

COURTNEY: (*audibly beating meat*) Here, (*pulls pants down with other hand*) let me help.

KURT: (*slaps Courtney*) Did I *FUCKING TELL YOU* to stop touching yourself???

COURTNEY: No, I—

KURT: (*slaps Courtney again*)

COURTNEY: (*gasp*)

KURT: Shut the fuck up. (*pulls her hair back, arching neck*) Eat me. (*shoves pussy in Courtney's mouth*)

COURTNEY: (*muffled groaning, mumbling incoherently*)

KURT: (*smirks*) God fucking damn it! (*laughs*) Can't even shut you up with my fucking cunt? Jesus— Fuck! (*grins evilly*)

COURTNEY: (*gargles, chomps*)

KURT: (*clenched teeth*) No don't fuckin' stop— (*pisses*)

*COURTNEY stares up lovingly past his tits. The SUN GLARES behind his head through the ASH like a halo. Acrid, bitter warmth fills her mouth, spilling out down her chin, FLOWS down her shirt, SOAKS her CUTOFF JEAN SHORTS, her PANTIES, her PUBIC MOUND; in all the excitement, she's let go and PISSED herself too. BLOOD STREAMS down KURT'S CROTCH. Lost in their bliss, they don't notice the NATIONAL GUARD closing in on them through the haze and the rubble. The NATIONAL GUARD OPENS FIRE.*

INT. COURTNEY'S ROOM — DAY.

*The CEILING FAN HUMS above them as it ROTATES SLOWLY like a U.F.O. A phone VIBRATES on the table, PLAYING the song "1979" by the Smashing Pumpkins. The screen reads "08:00". COURTNEY TURNS OFF ALARM. COURTNEY notices KURT has already left the room.*

He doesn't say nothing to no one before he leaves. Just throws on some clothes and heads right on out the door. Hit with the same chill he feels every Christmas. Birds are chirping like always. There's salt in the air, and his eyes trace the pavements to the woods down past the cul-de-sac.

His entire life was a fucking joke. Just some absurd shitty fucking cosmic joke. A bad one, at that. All the killing, the cover band, their entire relationship. It was like some dumb crap he used to read on AO3. Courtney always talked about being angry, but she would never let *him* show it, not without calling him "toxic" first. To be fair, he used to always talk over her, but that dynamic had swung the other way a long time. He shut his mouth for her a long time ago. Her stupid fuck, her blushing bride.

Dead leaves crunch beneath his feet as Vince Guaraldi blares from some dad's garage nearby.

He hated the obviousness of it all. He hated all the parallels. Blond hair and blue eyes. Pisces and Cancer. The significance of their birth years. The circumstances of their meeting. Their chosen names. All the weed, Mountain Dew, acid, all the times they cheated on each other, even though they were *technically* poly...

Vince Guaraldi fades as he wades a path through the crackling, dry underbrush.

He hates all those stupid songs, and he hates his obsession with trying to get them right. Courtney was right! None of this really matters. Why did he still wanna play in a fucking cover band? Playing the show has never been Courtney's idea. Even that first time, she just wanted to get high and blow the whole thing off. Kurt should have listened to her! Instead, he had to beg her not to cancel. It was for a good cause, he said! It's fucking Christmas! Besides, it was going to be *fun*.

David their drummer was like a human metronome. He knew *way* more about grunge than Courtney; he was a record collector, a music nut... he'd introduced them both to shit like Bam Bam and Dickless and Shonen Knife, showed them all the deep cuts and B-sides. But Courtney never wanted to hang out with David. "Sorry, there's just something about *men*," she'd always say. "Doesn't matter how nice they are. They just always give me the *creeps*."

He comes across a deer. It turns and scampers at the sight of him through a gateway of twisted trees.

If they're gonna be understudies, why couldn't they get any of the details right? Kurt Cobain never nailed any of his guitar solos. He *hated* guitar solos. Thought they were antithetical to punk. Kurt could only play them note for note, because he'd played them so many times he knew every note by heart. It broke his brain trying to deviate from those melodies he already knew so intimately. It felt *wrong* to play it wrong, even if he knew it was *right*.

He passes through the gateway of twisted trees.

Kurt couldn't even play guitar left-handed. He never worked as a janitor or dropped out of high school. He did ketamine every now and again, but he never even thought so much about touching heroin (thanks in part to an anecdote he read about Hubert Selby Jr.). Never huffed glue, whippits, never really huffed much of anything that didn't come in a tiny brown bottle labeled "leather cleaner"; not even Barbasol. How the fuck did he off playing some kind of genderfucked reincarnation? Was this his punishment for his hubris? For reinventing the dead with such a blatant disrespect for historical accuracy?

The gateway darkens and narrows as the brush beneath his feet begins to clear, a path emerging before him. He shivers.

He knows people grow apart over time, but this still took him by surprise. He never really saw it coming, he didn't even notice until it was already there. Now it just all seemed so clear in hindsight. The way she always treats them like a boyfriend, except when it's convenient for her not too. Or when she wants to make him feel stupid about something. She always finds a way to make everything about her.

He comes across an altar made of uncut stone. A dagger lay nearby, blood still on the blade, turned black from oxidation, trailing lines across the clearing, forming a pentagram. He lay on the cold, jagged granite, feeling its ridges pressing awkwardly into his back. They stare up past the pines rising up at an empty, grey sky. They decide it's not that bleak after all. The empty grey turns a faint shade of amethyst. Maybe it's his vision fading. He closes his eyes and imagines falling up into the atmosphere, out into space, faster and faster, until he bursts into flames. He's already numb and fuzzy from the cold. The wind howls. Sleep comes to everyone.

INT. COURTNEY'S ROOM — DAY.

*The CEILING FAN HUMS above them as it ROTATES SLOWLY like a U.F.O. A phone VIBRATES on the table, PLAYING the song “1979” by the Smashing Pumpkins. The screen reads “08:00”. COURTNEY TURNS OFF ALARM. KURT WRAPS his HAND AROUND her MOUTH. His LIPS touch her EAR.*

KURT: (*whispering*) Hey. (*through teeth*) Let's cut the bullshit. Okay? *I've had my fill.*

COURTNEY SQUIRMS.

KURT: (*whispers*) You asked me what I wanted for Christmas once and I said I wanna make you smile. Just once. But I don't think that's gonna happen. So. I think I'd like to change my mind.

COURTNEY: (*muffled agreement*)

KURT: (*slowly*) I can tell you hate me, at least, some part of you. I know you wanna kill me, but I know you don't wanna cross any boundaries. I can respect that. But. Maybe I wanna be your victim. Maybe. I want you to fuck my brains out. *Literally.* I guess, (*chuckles nervously*) I think what I really want is I want you to fuck me to death. I am asking you for this kindly. I am begging you. *Please.* (*pause*) Not here though. I don't wanna be anywhere near your fucking parents when it happens. Not that it really matters, just. (*pause*) You think we can have some breakfast first?

They finish eating, then pack up and get in Courtney's gray Volvo again. They drive off and stop at a roadside motel right next to the beach advertising free HBO. Red sheets, gray carpet striped black and white, big bed with a big wooden headboard, carvings of wild horses with twisted faces. They stuff a wet towel under the door, take the batteries out the smoke alarm, then smoke ten blunts in a row between them. Courtney helps Kurt boof some ketamine, then straps him to the bed. "If you gotta piss yourself, just go ahead and just piss yourself," Courtney says. "Pretty little thing like you." She sighs. "You're not long for this world, anyways." Runs her nails across their body. Hand around their throat. Ties a chain around it; twirls it gracefully around her hand. Takes out a knife. Razor sharp. Runs it along the length of his body, in spirals around his limbs. Brilliant, crimson threads spring up in dotted lines from thin threads of pink. He feels his breath begin to slow, and his muscles start to relax. She shoves panties soaked in LSD inside his mouth and cotton balls soaked in amyl nitrate in his nostrils. He grows limp, soft. Amniotic. He feels how wet he is, drooling on the regal patterned bedding. Muscles relax as the colors saturate and blur. He feels Courtney's fingers, wet with lube, slipping inside of him, takes a deep breath. He feels the chain tighten around his throat. He feels another finger, in and out, stretching him a bit, pouring more lube in his ass, then three fingers, four, soon, the rest of her hand, up to her wrist. She feels him pressing up against his spot, making them spurt like a geyser. He feels the knife edge running along his chest, across his nipples. He feels his stomach distending from her hand inside him. He feels her pull it slowly in and out of him. Faster and faster. Deeper and deeper. She cuts him a little more, pulling the skin up with the tip of her blade playfully. He feels her bringing her fingers together, clenching, as she dives deeper into his rectum He feels her fucking him with her fist. She's deep in his guts, and she starts stabbing him with the other hand. Each new piercing feels like a pressure valve letting off steam; blissful white heat, warm blood drooling from the wounds. He feels her fist running deep through his flesh, gooey, dripping. Brilliant, burning

anguish. Fire inside him. Right beneath his heart. Right beneath his belly. Her nails were digging into his stomach, his liver; agonizing pain inside him dulled by the drugs, skin numb and tingly, pleasant. Soft. Spinning, drooling; trying, failing to scream through the panties in his mouth. He cums. Finally after a lifetime of waiting he cums. He knows in this moment this was the closest he would ever be able to get to anyone. Literally. He can't help but laugh until he starts coughing up blood. Her fingers wormed through his insides, enmeshed deep into his insides. Up to her elbow in him. She was wearing them like a sleeve. He let out a long exhale through his nose, seized, died, and fell limp. Courtney pulled her arm out from his anus, trailing behind dribbling shit, guts, bits, blood and prolapse. "Heh," she says to no one. "Merry Christmas, ya filthy animal." She sat at the foot of his bed like a dog. Drooling down her Babes in Toyland shirt. Her head boils, and she grinds her teeth. How dare he die on her. *How dare he die on her.* Head in her hands— *smells awful.* She wants to scream. She was so pissed, and she could smell him soaking through the sheets. Her pulse quickened. She felt herself become hard, and she saw his corpse's perfect pussy right there, framed by his hip bones and prolapse beneath a blanket of viscera. His inverted bowels trail from his body like ellipses, or a thigh-high veiny beige, pink and purple sock. She grips onto the corpse, digs her nails deep into his sides, slides her clit inside his body like a sex doll, all the shit and cum and fluids mixed together with the lube. Fucks it until she cums, gripping the chain until the body's head turns deep blue. Empty, she withdraws, gasps for air. She can't even recognize his pieces anymore. Takes the knife to the body and starts cutting all the skin off. Maybe dissection can help her make sense of all this gore. On through the muscle and ligaments and all his guts and insides, all the shit, all the bile, making her skin all tacky and slick all over. Until it blotted out every part of her. Until she was coated in him. Mealy, wet. Wearing him like a blanket. Took him apart, rifled through him. Pulled apart all the bones, sorted through them, disassembled. Turned over every piece, sorted out his inner machinations. No one else would ever be as close to

him as she was. Not like this. Not without judgment. Rolls around in the twitching pile of his dismembered, dissected pieces. Savoring their gentle warmth. Adrenaline fades, and she finds herself cold and numb again. Shaking, spent. Skin tingling. At the brink. Takes a fatal dose of antidepressants. Lies herself gently over his desiccated bone, meat, organs, muscles, ligaments, teeth. Vomits. Dies.

INT. COURTNEY'S ROOM — DAY.

*The CEILING FAN HUMS above them as it ROTATES SLOWLY like a U.F.O. A phone VIBRATES on the table, PLAYING “1979” by the Smashing Pumpkins. The screen reads “08:00”. COURTNEY SHUTS IT OFF.*

Soon as he wakes back up, he wants to go back there. He's not sure if she'll ever take him that far again, although she'd taken him there plenty of times before. She always did. It always came in cycles like this. Even now, as she rolled over, Kurt doubted it would be long before she started wanting to kill again. But for now, he closed his eyes, he felt as one with her. He could still feel her arm inside her. A phantom limb. Might last a day. Might last forever.

INT. SLUGGO'S.

*The room is dusty and crowded, bodies filling up to burst, rubbing elbows with the wooden paneling. The "stage" is a BLUE RUG with MARSHALL STACKS and a DRUM KIT. SHOW POSTERS wallpaper the room. DAVID steps behind the KIT. KURT and COURTNEY stand adjacent; COURTNEY PLUGS IN her 1974 LEFT-HANDED RICKENBACKER 4001c64 as KURT TUNES his GIBSON 2008 LES PAUL STANDARD IN HERITAGE CHERRY SUNBURST.*

KURT: *(quietly)* Is this thing on? Can anyone hear me? *(coughs)*

COURTNEY: *(screaming)* WE ARE HEART-SHAPED BOX AND WE'RE HERE TO MAKE YOU THINK ABOUT DEATH AND GET SAD AND STUFF! ONE! TWO! THREE! FOUR!

7th Annual Spiritual Healing Christmas Benefit Concert  
Sluggo's (Pensacola, FL / Dec 25th, 2021)  
*25,164th performance*

Radio Friendly Unit Shifter  
Miss World  
Drain You  
Doll Parts  
Breed  
Babydoll  
Jesus Doesn't Want Me For A Sunbeam (Vaselines)  
Turpentine  
He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss) (Crystals)  
Come As You Are  
Beautiful Son  
Blew  
All Apologies  
Softer, Softest  
Rape Me  
Asking for It  
Aneurysm



SUNDAY AFTER

# ANGELA'S EYES ROLL

back into her head as she lets out a low hum. 'Good.. .' A single bead of drool trails down the side of her cheek. She's three fingers deep inside of her. 'Cum for me you stupid little slut.' Six knuckles bend pressing into her prostate over and over again, her cock twitching in rhythm with them, cum trailing tiny rivers pooling up in her pubes. 'Mommy... mommy...' she leaks, weeps. All else fades away.

The girl comes to screaming. She hadn't woken up in the middle of the night like that since college. 'Babydoll?' Ginger groans awake. Angela usually drank or smoked too much to worry about having dreams lately. 'What's wrong, love?' Ginger grabs her, squeezes her tight, bodies cupped together, skin slick and cool, soaking her sheets. She's drawn the covers over them and turned what little light they had down even lower. 'Bad dream?'

Angela could've sworn she'd been there before. She was standing right in front of the frame, eyes trailing its gilded elegance, frightened to turn her gaze to the canvas. The only light there was her phone— She'd fallen through here, by accident. Stumbled through a red velvet curtain.

On her days off Angela and Ginger would get wasted and wander round art museums. They stop by the coffee shop for overpriced pumpkin spice lattes and pastries and flirt some gay shit about how cute they look together. They snap a cute little selfie together and put it on Instagram.

'I'm cold...' Angela shivers.

'That's because you're drunk,' Ginger snuffles.

Then she runs into a tall redhead in glasses Angela used to know from before she dropped out of MCAD... Her name was 'Ellen' or something, she couldn't remember; she was drinking a lot back then at the time. Not that she didn't still drink now, she just had it a lot more under control these days.

But she was worried this girl might still smell it on her. I mean, she

didn't really try to hide it or nothing back then. Probably one of the reasons she got kicked out in the first place. 'Whatever,' she mutters under her breath. As she tries to sneak off mid-conversation, she stumbles into someplace dark and trips over something.

She was lying on the marble just a few feet away from the behemoth. Golden flame flickering from her phone light like chainmail, spiraling around the thick layers of caked-on stratified paint that rose up from the surface like the back of an alligator through pond scum. A world of ash and bone beckoned forth for her. It was foggy on the surface, but it seemed to split apart and invited her to come inside. The surface became a window to someplace frozen in time; the air in there seemed heavy, ashy with soot. In the center of the frame, like the surface of the sun, brilliant cascading spiraling spider's web of eyes circling circling eyes circling eyes stared down at her, bifurcating itself into greater fractions and degrees, seeming to turn like a wheel inside a wheel; its intricacy and complexity increasing with each passing second, her breath becoming heavy and labored, the lines sharpening into focus, a thousand dilated pupils gazing back at her—

'HEY KID, YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE IN HERE,' the redhead says, breaking Angela's concentration. Emma, was it? She wished she could remember, but maybe it was for the best she played the part of a stranger. Ginger was standing behind her, flustered and worried.

'Where the fuck were you?' Ginger drove them home in the dark, hands shaking. 'You were gone for, like, three fucking hours.'

They smoked two joints and watched this fucked up movie about a girl trying to cut a baby out from a pregnant woman with a pair of scissors. Angela clutched Ginger tight as she stuffed a binkie in her mouth. She'd never been too big on scary movies, but Ginger always made it fun. There was always ketamine and weed and wine and snacks and fucking when it was all finally over.

But soon as she's asleep again she's back staring through into

wherever it was. She realizes there's no surface; she can step on through, if she pleases. Her hand runs down the frame; it's cold to the touch like glass, but the texture feels kinda like reptile.

The wood is wet beneath her feet. She travels through chambers, dread in her heart. Slowly, single file. Big figures, shadows drift by and whisper words; she does as they say. Fingers close in around her. Air heavy. They pick away at her, *but it's not you*, the voices say. She's in the shape of something else. Something young. Merely a vessel. They say nothing here is real; this is merely a game we play. Fingers pry and prod in her flesh at seams that pull apart revealing nothing underneath.

Tessellating sensation staring down close by candlelight conjoining into pairs that float just beyond restraints. Pulsing flowing downstream out through no don't sorry no don't pretty please stop please stop no don't—

They put it in a box deep beneath all the others. Where no one can else hear it scream.

Sorry please stop no not this any more.

There is nothing to be done. This room is much too small. Nowhere to be found.

Maybe if it's quiet, if it sits perfectly still. Maybe if it hurts itself. Maybe God will see it atoning for its ways. Maybe God will make everything okay.

Living off of what looks like mud and grass and pills fed through a slot on a tiny tin tray.

Collared and properly trained. *Sit.*

Doesn't piss and shit everywhere like some of the others. Gets it all in the hole.

The pills make it easier to forget. It is an abscess veil cut from reality in the shape of a body.

Time will mend this just like everything else. Down on its knees. *Good.* Opens its mouth. Molten gold pours out onto the floorboards.

///

On the first day it snowed that year it came down so hard they couldn't see out the window and someone had to crawl out the second story to dig out the front door. That same night, Ginger left Angela in her sleep without saying anything. Just a note on the table: 'I pray your dreams someday find will you.' So Angela put on her snow boots and her big green military surplus coat and walked half a mile through snow and bought a big bottle of vodka and ordered a bunch of Thai food.

Maybe it was for the best they were broken up now. At last long dark nights of boxed wine and dreamless sleep. She had so much more space now too, and wasn't it funny now in hindsight, all those times she'd freak out about nothing and have herself a little "pity party" and cried and begged everyone else to just leave her the fuck alone so she could kill herself in peace? Angela had finally gotten exactly what she asked for. She stared out at the street as it filled with snow, sipping burnt coffee, filling up page after page in her notebook with little doodles of eyeballs. Cars slipped and spun out in the parking lot below, flinging brown slush around as their tires struggled to find any traction.

//

Angela first met Ginger at a Halloween party wearing a GIR onesie sitting alone in the corner nursing a beer.

'Fuck yeah! I love that show,' Angela said.

'Oh yea?'

'Yea I didn't really have too many friends growing up so I'd just watch it over and over and make pretend like I did....'

'You should show me sometime,' Ginger said. 'I honestly never saw that much, I just needed something to throw on.' Angela noticed the girl's makeup run down her face.

'Oh shit, are you okay?' Angela asked.

'Haha no not really...' Ginger shrugged. 'You ever get called a

pedophile on the internet?’

‘I mean...’ Angela smirks. ‘Am I trans?’

That onesie sat stuffed in a drawer in the closet by all the other clothes Angela didn’t wear anymore. She hadn’t worn it in since Ginger gave it to her last Christmas. ‘Figured you’d get more use out of this than I ever could,’ Ginger said as Angela threw her arms around her neck. They’d fucked on the second date halfway through *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. On their third date she told her she thought she was falling in love with her.

‘Thank you,’ she’d always whisper in her ear after she came.

She finished stocking the green and black plushies on the rack by the manga section and the memory faded from her. That was just a little over a year ago... none of Angela’s relationships ever seemed to last very long. ‘Snap out of it,’ she muttered to herself. She couldn’t afford to get stuck in her head like this again, not at a cushy new retail job like this. She couldn’t really afford to lose another.

Soon thereafter she was clocking out and running through the door of the Barnes & Noble into the Mall of America rotunda. The levels towered above her in a dizzying, jagged display; Christmas lights, tinsel and green dangling down from everything. Most of the floor was roped off so people could set up the stage for the free Carly Rae Jepsen show as cops redirected throngs of rich families hands full of bags towards the Nickelodeon theme park or the exit by the aquarium.

Angela slips by two grips in all-black carrying big hunks of metal past the convenience store and tourism center by the crossing, nearly slipping on the grainy gray slurry layered over the concrete, through the doors down the musty stairs to the transit center, past a bunch of mall security pigs and onto the Blue Line just as the mechanical doors start to close behind her.

She watches the gunmetal/yellow sky slip under a flurry of white through a window past the crowd clutching the railing. Down to the airport, slipping underground, all the tunnel walls whooshing by in blackness. A few more stops and a transfer just to barely catch the bus to

the house party. Her new coworker invited her, the only other trans woman there who didn't work in the coffee shop and somehow dissociated nearly twice as much as she did. Lily, was it? Angela had always been terrible with names. She meant to ask her at the party, but by the time she worked up the courage to approach her, she simply couldn't be found anywhere... Angela was excited; she hadn't been to a house show in forever, and someone said there'd be two kegs there. Two of them.

She met up the bassist for the second band in the front yard just as the first went on. Her name was Jennifer and she was really friendly for a cis girl. 'Oh shit hey babe!' she hugged her tight. 'Glad you could make it!' The first day she trained Angela in she smoked her out in the stockrooms and told if anyone ever tried to give Angela any shit she should just let her know so she could beat their ass. 'I used to have some pretty fucked up views back in the day but then my sister came out and I was like "Oh shit it really huh guess it could happen to anyone!"' So she was trying to be a better ally and everything to make up for whatever.

'This is the coat room,' she said. 'There's pizza in here,' the kitchen. A bunch of dudes in button-ups and slacks, girls in black dresses. A long folding table has been set up and two frat bros with goatees play beer pong. 'Snacks, drinks, whatever, help yourself! Go nuts!' she smiled and laughed. 'This is Angela, by the way, everyone.'

'Hi, Angela!' they chimed in unison.

So Angela snuck into the joint rotation around a 13-player game of Cards Against Humanity beneath a gaudy golden candelabra and took a couple shots with a girl who asked if she listened to Against Me! 'I'm more a fan of their earlier work, to be honest, before they sold out,' she said as she pulled a Polaroid from her purse. 'Maybe I'm just biased; I've always been more a country girl at heart, I suppose.' Angela looks at the picture of her sharing a bong with Laura Jane Grace backstage on the Shape Shift With Me tour. 'Haha but yeah! My boyfriend works at First Ave,' she explained. 'He gets me into everything!' She asked if she

wanted to do some K heading down to the basement to watch the show.

The first band was a decent Joyce Manor knockoff only their songs were twice as long and the guitar solos sucked and the singer couldn't really sing even half as well and the drummer only knew three different beats. Angela mostly just hugged the back wall and sipped keg beer until she couldn't hold in her piss anymore.

She saw that redhead again, heading up the stairs, sitting on a couch, lighting a joint. The spark off the lighter caught her eye. She smiled and waved at her, and Angela waved back.

Waiting for the bathroom some guy got real angry about her spoiling the latest Wonder Woman movie for him. He called her antisemitic for bringing up Gal Gadot's involvement with the IDF before some other guy in an Iron Man shirt dragged him off while glaring back at her.

'Fucking nazi,' he growls.

'Yea well fuck you too, dipshit!' she shouted at his back as she lifted her middle fingers up like antennas to heaven. She wanted to say 'Free Palestine!' or something important but didn't want to come off as patronizing. Then she pissed and snuck into the bedroom connected to the bathroom by a door, unbearably bright and empty except for a bunch of IKEA furniture, a floor mattress, a glass pipe in the shape of pickle Rick, a grinder full of weed and a lighter with a topless zombie chick on it. She sat beneath the fluorescent flickering light and hotboxed the room and sipped from the bottle she stole from the kitchen her hands went numb.

Jennifer's band went up after Angela chugged a Red Bull from the fridge. They reminded her a bit of early Bolt Thrower, how the members audibly strained to keep up pace with each other. Their set was a bit shorter than the first band but much better for it; some guys even opened up a pit or something like it. Whatever you'd call guys shoving each other around. Their friction helped stave off the cold.

Their singer sounded exactly like the guy from Interpol with his voice pitched up an octave. His beard was a mess and he wore a red

hanky in the back right pocket of his overalls. Angela wondered if he even knew what flagging was.

The guitarist, though; strong arms, lots of piercings, beautiful baby blue eyes. He was wearing cutoff shorts a spiked denim jacket with a big Slipknot patch on the back over a Liturgy HAQQ t-shirt. A couple times during the show his gaze pierced Angela's and she blushed imagining those big hands pressed against her shirt. She shook it off then went to the keg to pour herself another beer.

'Hey!' Angela ran up to him after the show out back by the bonfire. 'I fucking love your shirt,' she said. She was shaking in her boots on the exposed dead frozen earth where the snow had melted.

'Haha thanks,' said the guy, sipping on a Lime-A-Rita. 'I saw 'em, I think it was OPN who opened for them? I dunno if you know who that is, or...'

'Yeah, uhh no, I know. Replica? Garden of Delete? Guy did the music for Uncut Gems and The Bling Ring...'

'Ahhh, I see,' he grinned. 'So you're a cinephile.'

'Haha, not really,' Angela blushes. 'My ex was really into movies though...' she kinda trails off. 'Ha ha.'

'Well that's cool,' he says. 'I'm more into books anyways.'

'Oh, neat,' she said, struggling to remember the last time she read anything. 'I'm sorry, I— What's your name again?'

'It's okay, it's Jeremy— I've told you this, like, 3 times already.'

'Haha, shit, you're right,' Angela slurred. 'Funny,' she smiled.

His cock was shoved deep down her throat, stretching her jaw out, fingers weaving into her hair, nails digging into her scalp when the cops came to break the party up. She caught red and blue in the corner of her eyes through the bushes, pulled out from her throat; she coughed. '*Shit.*' They looped around the back alleys to the guy's neon lime-green sports car.

The last thing she remembers before blacking out: Fuck yea, you drive stick??' She slurs. She exhales, and everything cascades out around her in a blur of iridescent ribbons. '*That is so fucking c—*'

Today is special somehow. Tables rise up to her eyes on long, pendulous arms, carved and polished veneers drooping and soft, knotted claws where they touch the carpet. Bright, colorful shapes tower over her, muttering stuff she doesn't understand or make out. Other forms like hers run around nearby screaming playfully. Ice cream cake and Mountain Dew. Toy Story 2 plays off VHS nearby.

She wanders around this white and beige place streaming ribbons and balloons everywhere. Forms gather around the couch leaning over to watch shapes run a ball up and down a big, long green, lots of hooting and hollering

She feels something crunch and yelp beneath her feet.

Her head looks down. A familiar form— no. No no no. Distorted and twisted. A shrill scream; a symphony of them in unison, in cascade. Pointing, worried, horrified. A scowl in her direction. Her arm is yanked, pulled away from the pile of fur and eyes twitching on the carpet. Someone starts crying. Red leaks out from the corners around the matted fur.

Sunlight stung like salt in a papercut. She smells something musky, something sour. Feels something wet on her cheek. A small trail of vomit soaked and caked onto a grey pillowcase.

She worms her way out from under Jeremy's arm, staggers out of bed, nearling falling over. Grabs his desk chair for support, falls to her knees. He snores and rumbles but doesn't stir. Angela takes a deep breath, gags. Cold sweat and bubble guts. She makes it to the bathroom just in time to empty the contents of her stomach into the toilet.

She takes a quick shower, not even long enough to let the water get hot. Rinses out her mouth with water from the shower-head and Listerine. Surveys the fresh, blotchy bruises all over her body. The wetness in her ass crack. Pulls her fingers up to her eyes to find faint traces of blood and cum.

She throws on her clothes from last night, finds her phone and everything else plus a couple bottles in her bag she doesn't

recognize—she had a personal rule she'd never go to a cis person's party without taking *something*. Her body is awash with nausea, like a human washing machine, a blur of inertia as she whirls towards the exit. She hears Jeremy as she slams the door behind her: 'YO WHAT THE FU—'

She barely had enough phone battery to map out her route home and nearly missed the bus. She catches her breath in the backseats, feels a soreness setting in all over. She looked around real quick and took a tiny bottle of whiskey out of her bag. She snuck one slug, then snuck another.

Angela felt a hand tapping her shoulder and whipped around, nearly spilling her bottle.

'Oh, shit!' she wheezes.

'Hey girl,' says the redhead from the Walker. 'Long time no see,' She smiles, wrapped up in scarves, hoodie pulled over her head.

'Haha, yeah, seriously,' Angela croaks. Her voice is hoarse and raw.. The redhead swings around the support pole and slips into the seat right beside her. 'You want some?' Angela nods towards the bottle.

The girl takes it from her. 'Hey, it's 5 o'clock somewhere.' She takes a swig and gives Angela a curious look. 'I swear, I thought this last time I saw you too, but honest to God, your face looks *awful* familiar...' Angela pulled her hair from her eyes and zipped her coat up all the way. 'You're Ginger's girl, right?'

'Not for a while, no,' she grins somberly. 'She, uhm. You know...'

'Oh, damn, fuck. I'm so sorry. I had no idea...'

'Yeah...' Angela takes another sip from the bottle.

'Fuck. I haven't seen her in forever, damn...' the girl takes a small yellow bottle out from her bag. 'You went home with the guitarist, huh?'

'Yeah...'

'Not gonna lie, he was pretty cute...' she takes another swig. 'I was gone before the pigs got there. You hear about what all went down?'

'I was, uhm. Out back...'

'I see,' the girl nudges her with her elbow. 'Nice.' She crushes a pill between two quarters and snorts the powder.

'What's that?' Angela asks.

'Oh, this? Fuck, I can't pronounce it... Good for hangovers, though. You want some?'

'Sure,' Angela says, and the girl crushed her up a pill to snort. 'What's your name, by the way?' she asks, a familiar numbness quickly coming over, smoldering her with ember. 'How's the Walker treating you?'

'Oh I quit last month,' she adjusts her glasses. 'Actually, they kinda fired me...'

'Well that's transphobic,' Angela says. '...Remind me your name again? Ella...?'

'I thought I told your ass,' says the girl. 'I told you at the party, remember?'

Angela laughs and admits, 'There's a lot I don't remember.'

'Well. You *were* pretty drunk,' the girl smirks. 'You asked me, like, three times...'

Angela shrugs. 'Memory's never been my strong suit...'

'I see. You're lucky, honey, because I remember everything,' the girl smiles. 'You're lucky you're so fucking pretty.' Angela blushed. 'My name's Evelyn. Evelyn Green. And this time your eyes ain't nowhere near as red so you'd best not forget.' She hands her the bottle and she takes another pull and gags. 'You're Angela, right?'

/

It started out subconscious but after a while she just couldn't ignore it anymore; they were everywhere. First her notebooks, her planners and her diary, then spreading out everywhere else. Carving them the surface of the fake wood veneer her cheap corkwood desk with a pocket knife. Almond shape, big circle on the inside. Black out the middle. Then it spread out onto the mirrors, in lipstick. After that the

walls. Rising up around all the furniture like ivy. Gilding the fridge and the tables and countertops.

Evelyn invited Angela over that December. [why didnt u text me?] she asked, a week after she exchanged numbers with her on the bus.

[just tryin not 2 be weird haha] Angela typed back.

[i gave yoU my number] she replied. [How would that be weird??]

[idk lol]

Evelyn lived in a loft in downtown Minneapolis high up so when the snow was coming down like this you couldn't make out the streets below or the buildings across the way them—like she was living in a snowglobe. They were sitting in these ornately woven chairs covered in heated blankets wrapped up in sweaters. Evelyn had brewed them both a big pot of mushroom tea. She pulls a bag of white crystals out from her bootleg Louis Vuitton bag and loads some into a bulb attached to a bong and holds a lighter under the bulb until the crystals all vaporize. The smell's familiar. Like cat piss.

'You want any?' Evelyn asks, holding out the bong. 'Nah, I think I'm good,' Angela laughs, loading another bowl into her stolen pickle Rick pipe. The wind is harsh enough to blow open the copy of *Infinite Jest* (NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE) sitting on the table by the railing.

'Hey, you remember that room you found me in?' Angela asks. 'At the Walker.'

'Oh yeah, that one with the weird painting in it?'

'So you've seen it too?' she takes a hit.

'Haha, yeah, no. I've seen that painting,' she grins.

'Do you know what that was? That exhibit. The artist. I tried looking it up online but I couldn't figure out what the hell it was supposed to be a part of.'

'Ah, fuck, yeah, no, that was the weird thing,' Evelyn says. 'Like a week later I'm sweeping at close and I notice that area—that was right behind those Takashi Murakami pieces? Yeah, no that place was

completely blocked off. So I have no fucking clue who's painting that was, I mean. I didn't read the epigraph or whatever.

'But, like, maybe that was the point? I remember back at MCAD they'd tell us everything about a piece was intentional, even the mistakes. That's why you still judge a book by its cover, even though people say you shouldn't. It's not just what's inside that counts. It's the whole experience of interacting with the object in a physical space.

'You know what it reminded me of?' she continued. 'Like, a few years back I went to the MoMA with my cousin Mary, there was some real freaky shit. Supposedly— You familiar with YZRA?' Angela shook her head. 'They're this enby visual artist from California? Did this really fucked up installation in the 00's... "LIVE AFTER DEATH," I think it was called? They convinced all these death row convicts to go through this procedure... basically the first time anyone's ever extracted a human nervous system from a body. Set up basically these see-through neural computers, attached them to cameras and a screen, so they could see people coming to visit. Basically, they were told before the procedure they would be allowed to draw whatever they would like, and they were taught how to use the program to paint with their minds.

'And they've been doing that on tour between countries ever since then. Part of the agreement to be a part of the piece was they could never pull the plug on them. They have to supply a constant flow of electricity to them or else they die. They have to change out the fluid like once a month or else they die. I was reading somewhere it costs like \$1.3 million a year just to keep them going, but, like, that's nothing when you got Damien Hirst money...

'You remember that... thing in the center of the painting? The longer you stare the more it bifurcates, like, it just sucks you in, it's like that one Animal Collective album cover... Freaky shit. I just couldn't look away... that was all I could remember.

'I came to in a hospital room,' Evelyn said. 'They found me passed out in the exhibit, just like we did you.'

Angela looks confused. '...The fuck?'

‘Yeah, it was real fucked up...’

‘No, what the fuck do you mean, “just like we did you?”’ Her head aches, buzzes like a fridge. ‘...No, I remember you two finding me, I wasn’t passed out,’ Angela says. ‘I remember Ginger took me home...’

‘You had that fucking gash in your head, don’t you remember?’ Evelyn waits for a response. ‘There was blood *everywhere*,’ she said, ‘We had to carry your ass out.’

Angela shrugs. ‘I’m sorry, I... I don’t remember any of that...’

She didn’t get home that night until after midnight and didn’t fall asleep until sunrise just stayed up drinking boxed wine in Ginger’s old GIR onesie and watching Moral Orel until she spilled red wine on it and cried for a while. She thought about the suction cup dildo Ginger bought her last Christmas, the one with the knot in the middle and the soft orange ridges, and was just about to fuck herself then she realized she hadn’t had any lube for months. Maybe it was for the best. She really didn’t want to think about it.

Angela never fucked when she was sober, so her and Evelyn got along pretty well. It felt nice to not have to hear someone else tell her she needed to get sober.

She woke up in the afternoon just as the sun was starting to go down, ivering, frigid; she’d forgotten to shut her window. The floor had frozen over with a thin veneer of frost. She chiseled away at the ice in the window frame with a screwdriver, slammed the window shut and turned the heat all the way up. Then she made herself a cup of tea. She was starving.

Evelyn asked her what her kinks were on the second date.

‘You know, I’m not really sure, haha.’ Angela picked at a hole in her tights. ‘I don’t really think about it very often. Usually I just ask someone else to go first and go with theirs, right? Makes it easier that way. So... I guess I don’t really have any of my own?’

‘I think that’s bullshit,’ Evelyn says. ‘You ever try hypno?’

Her eyes wander around the flame. ‘No, not really, I mean. Even if I knew how to get into all that...’ Angela turns and stares out over the balcony, and she wonders if she threw her body over the railing would the snow snuff out the sound of her fall. ‘It’s like I can’t shut the voice up inside of my head that tells me look what I’m doing wrong.’

Evelyn comes up behind her, wraps her arms around her waist. Whispers in her ear: ‘What if I gave you a pill that could shut it up for you?’

Angela spent the day washing the eyes off of everything best she could. Where she couldn’t scrub her scrawlings off the walls she’d moved posters around. It took half a bottle of Windex, two sponges and a magic eraser but she managed to make the place not look like the apartment of a crazy person.

They made out that night but she just kept getting lost inside her head. She took a sip out her bag in her bathroom then came back and shoved her down and started sucking her dick, and she was doing good, but every time she felt her jaw ache she felt fingers pushed her, deep in her guts, shifting her insides around, filling her with ice. Her vision focused on some spot in the corner of the room. A fleck or a stain in the shape of an X. ‘Hey girl,’ Evelyn says, noticing her drifting off. ‘*Where are you?*’

Earlier that same night, Evelyn came back from a piss and said, ‘Hey, so, this is gonna sound weird, but I saw your pills in the bathroom... I think we have the same deadname... Haha...’

‘Oh, haha, no, that’s my ex’s.’

‘Ginger’s? Fuck. OK. Haha,’ she blushes. ‘Funny. Well. You know. I didn’t see nothing.’

‘Yea I wish she hadn’t left those fucking bottles,’ Angela laughed. ‘You know, it *is* kinda funny though...’

‘Oh yeah?’ Evelyn takes a hit from the pickle Rick pipe and coughs.

‘After she left, I stopped having those dreams. I stopped dreaming,

period. Just nothing. So, I was curious, you know, because those dreams felt so specific, you know? Like. It felt like I was prying into someone else's dreams. They felt like *her*. Like, how it felt like when she used to hold me, except only I'm on the other side...

'So I, uh. Look. I know this is gonna sound real fucked up, OK? So don't judge me. But I Googled my ex's deadname. I took the name on those bottles there and put it in Google just to see what would come up. And I don't find her, specifically. But I *do* find this article about this guy with the same last name she used to have. And I start reading it, and. It's, like. Really fucked up.' Evelyn passes her the pipe, and she torches half the bowl. 'So anyways. Her dad, right? Ran this cult. I read the whole profile on it. They'd been doing this for, like, three decades out in the wilderness out near Grand Rapids. They'd kidnap teens as hitchhikers, make them breed in the basement. Then make the kids do all the same. They'd keep them cuffed up and blindfolded, brainwashed all these kids into thinking they were, like, literal agents of God. Like, cogs in his machine or something, you know. Cult shit. I can't even tell you what they were doing with them.

'But the compound, I've seen photos of it, and I mean. It freaked me the fuck out. It was like I was right back there, sleeping next to Ginger. They had these kids paint the walls, paint the ceilings, everything. Thousands of tiny eyes, corner to corner; didn't let them sleep until they were done. Once every Christmas, they'd make them paint it all over. Some of the kids would pass out from the fumes; I mean, this was underground, there wasn't much in the way of ventilation; some of them would die...

'There's a picture at the bottom. Her face is blurred out but you can just tell...' She goes quiet. Evelyn just stares for a second before setting the pipe on the table.

'What the fuck?'

'I know, right? It's *really* messed up...'

'What about that's supposed to be *funny*?' Evelyn gets up and starts pacing. 'Why would you tell me? Like, I *know* her...'

‘I’m sorry, I...’

Angela sighs. ‘Here’s what I’m gonna do. I’m just gonna forget you said all of that. I’m gonna pretend I don’t remember until I *actually* don’t remember.’

Evelyn sits down and rips the rest of the pipe til she cashes the bowl. She wipes ash from her tongue onto the backside of her hand.

‘I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to snap, it’s just...’ Evelyn sighs. ‘You remind me a lot of this girl I used to date,’ she says. ‘You’re very sweet but all you ever talk about is someone else.’ Angela stares off through the slits in the blinds at the bright silver gusts rushing by. ‘Hey,’ Evelyn says. ‘I’m sorry,’ she approaches her, turns her head to face her. ‘I love you.’ The words still felt alien to her ears even though they’d been repeating them for weeks. She couldn’t remember who or when they told each other first.

Angela took another shot and found an old whiskey bottle in the back of the cabinet. She couldn’t remember when she’d done it, but she’d covered the label in eyes with a silver sharpie. Almond shape, big circle on the inside.

She tried peeling the label off, but it was sticky and oily and only came off in bits so she gave up. She threw it in her dirty clothes basket before fishing it back out, taking a pull, then stuffing it back down in there.

Angela always imagined the more people she surrounded herself with, the more people she could check her memory against, but she never felt very safe in crowds. Tonight would be different though. Tonight Evelyn would introduce her to her girlfriend.

She got on her knees and prayed to whatever god would listen to make believe whatever visions came for her that night were hers and hers alone. No matter how awful they were she would swallow them bury them deep inside her, someplace dark where no light could ever escape.

An unquestionable presence gazes down upon her. The thing asks for a piece of her, she whispers wordless incantations in return, sealing her covenant. This will stay with her until she dies.



THANK YOUR  
LUCKY STARS

# HERE AND NOW

the center of it all fractured at the exact moment her fist breaks the surface as she shatters you into a million little pieces you will never know anything past this very instance. as the cracks form as you splinter her visage bitter misery teeth bared ruby eyes weep beneath disheveled strands and split ends, you untether from the linearity of experience. through every silver shard you were happening everywhere forever at once at the end of it all

you don't feel happy or scared or sad or confused or anything at all. without a body or a nervous system there is no chemical reaction for whatever intangible configuration your consciousness takes to have any kind of quantifiable response to its own physicality. there are no human analogues for these inanimate sensations. you itself are the looking-glass. scrying reproduces something like an echo. no up. no down. spiral around yourself in figure-eight. circulate through every perspective in an everlasting state of levitation. not quite emotion or memory in form, but something resembling its shadow. coiling through the void amidst the spider-webbed slivers of you

mourning at the foot of your bed curl up withdrawn into herself clawing at her face clenching sheets writhing. sorrow turns to anger turns to violence. exactly like you always used to be. a meticulously tempestuous disassembling of what remains. she ravages the personal effects you had left behind for her to deal with. she pulls empty drawers from dressers, pictures off the wall, tiny plastic figurines, assorted knick-knacks over birthdays christmases and graduations through the years. azure shrapnel littering the carpet. all the while howling wild in her lament, beyond words body contorted in desperate anguish

she invents fictions about you with your parents. they comment on childhood photographs as they flip through and mourn quietly sharing unsullied, carefully curated memories. the words they use for you are all

wrong. but you can't process any of that from here. besides. it works. from here on out your parents never see you as anything more than their lost precious troubled sad beautiful son. nothing she can do about it now. their minds are at ease. despite her visible anxiety, she seems to pass nicely; at the very least, they'll never learn the truth about either of you. she shows them the ring you bought her, which she wears on a chain around her neck. she gives it to them to remember you by, and keeps your old cross for herself. a memento

from before all that. you watch her take all the posters off your walls. all the clothes from your closet, all the lingerie and sundries from your drawers. she sorts them into two piles based on how your parents would read them, then boxes one pile up and sets the rest to the side amidst her sobs

keeps your secrets hid; locks them up tight and buries them deep inside to live forever in her heart. she undoes everything you left behind that would give you away. switches the pink bed sheets and comforter for the baby blue set you held on to since you were a child. discards all the sex toys lining the shelf, all the cuffs and lube and collars and rope and prop knives hanging from the wall. your dresses and earrings and bracelets and chokers and everything. all the stuffies and pill bottles and anime dvds and posters and anything else that might give you away. she dumps your dreg artifacts into thick black plastic trash bags, ties them up and drags them out the door. when she's finished there's nothing left in the room resembling you

steam the blood out from the carpet and scrub all the purple-black gunk from the paint and pick out all the tiny fragments of skull embedded in the wall

there she finds your body, tinged yellow-green, slumping over backwards, onset rigor mortis twisting your limbs to pull inward, hunting rifle trigger guard still wrapped around your bloated left toe. flies and maggots and mold. silence turns to shock turns to shrieks. echoes out into forever. longer than you think. eventually she grows

quiet, slams the door and stomps off elsewhere. dust wafts down past shafts of golden sunlight in an effervescent haze

the body unpacks its father's old hunting rifle on the bed. he gave it to you as a birthday present. if you were still human you'd find it ironic. the body methodically loads the rifle. the body takes its shoes off and sets them gently beside itself. wraps its mouth around the pipe-end gunmetal grey barrel and sets the the stock on the ground. stares at the vanity and pulls the trigger with its big toe. body's gaze staring at your self rolls back into its skull as the rear half of its brain splatters on the wall behind it, oozing downward in gentle cascades, pulsing fountain, threads of crimson and pink as the body reels and lurches from the blow, crosseyed and painless, ragdoll

continue to stare back at yourself long after that, albeit from a different vantage point. swirling still from the momentum of self-ejaculation. an open-air sculpture suspended in still life. hair draping down its shoulders. mouth agape. grotesque yet beautiful. split wide open at an exact second where you could even still identify such a feeling

before even then. all the arguments between you and her. all your endless episodes. countless suicide notes hastily scrawled and trashed over the months, years. empty bottles and endless clouds of pot smoke and streaming vomit. crying and fuming and blushing complexion. the body strikes itself with a religious fervor, in infinite permutations. beyond sorrow, beyond hate; she pulls your hands away by force. holds you through your tears. brushes your hair gently from your eyes. likeness of the sweetness your body felt in those hours, beneath all the waves of trembling numb washing past every gasp for breath

weaving through failed attempts. three separate times she finds the body lying on its side, dribbling puke, breathing slowly. each time first responders enter with a stretcher to carry it off, strapped down and twitching. another time, shiver with a knife in your hands, lines of crimson drawn across the arms. again they strap your body down and

carry it away. another time, she walks in as the body hangs a noose from the ceiling fan. she rushes in screaming to wrap her arms around you

bursts into every touch; a kaleidoscopic silhouette of amniotic comfort. drifting black and white chrome crushed red velvet blue-screen ribbons of snow drown you out from cohesion. perception flickers by like a film projector. so many different ways the body was. all the faces you worn before. all the secrets you kept. never leaving the dark

array of enclosed spaces with the same familiar trappings, rearranged slightly in every variation. trace their decay along every refraction. a procession of bodies. their respective honeymoons, and all the sordid affairs of everyone who graced your surface. drugs and fucking and light and laughter and awful things that shouldn't be. bodies twisting limbs around each other, scrunching up and soaking the sheets. heat sweat and blush. parents, family, siblings, strangers, yours, hers. perpetual motion into eternity, wrapping around distorted reflections of what once was yours, in fluttering whorls of coagulating tessellations between the patchwork aether you

nearly lost track of your ancillary self in the cataclysm. soon you regain something resembling bearing. no future. no past. only shallows. every now. there she is with the body, frozen in a singular juncture, in the penumbra of euphoric afterglow. you wrap your self around these two entropic apparitions. mirror this stillness, this halcyon release, bodies naked and bare, laid out and wrapped around themselves, breathless vapor, quiet air, spent, in the tranquil emptiness post-coitus. blissful wreath languorous anhedonia. nothing ever happens forever. you linger



DRYING

# FOLLOW THE SILVER

thread of sunlight with your eyes across the jawline down over the heart past curves of flesh and bone. Remember that one Hemingway story about the guy who dies staring at that stupid fucking mountain. In another life your girlfriend's bed was sanctuary, like one of those fairy fountains in *Ocarina of Time*. Now it's somewhere you sleep at night.

x x x

Yesterday's makeup always looked embarrassingly pretty on Heather. I could never pull off a look like that. I never figured out how she got away with it. How she kept her sheets so clean even with all the shadow and glitter.

I'm making chocolate chip pancakes in her cast iron skillet when she comes through the door wearing Hello Kitty pajamas.

Smells delicious.

We peck each other on the lips like an old married couple even though we're both just now only approaching thirty. She yawns and the robe slips open, revealing the dull and faded bruise between her breasts. Leon left that one. One of her other partners. I'd watched it change over the last couple days from pinkish black to green and yellow.

Heather yawns. Where'd you put the cups?

Should be there, in that cabinet.

She grabs a Kathy mug, pops the old Keurig pod out and puts a new one in.

You really didn't have to do this, you know. I thought we talked about going out?

I just couldn't fall back to sleep. Figured I'd do something nice.

Well. This is nice. But please don't work so hard, you'll end up like me. Besides, you know I don't get too many days off...

As if on queue her phone starts vibrating across the table. It's blaring '9 to 5' by Dolly Parton and the screen reads "BIG BOSS". She sighs and cusses under her breath. We couldn't have gone out if we wanted to.

x x x

We're supposed to be getting a new dishwasher in the next couple of days so until then I'm still stuck doing dishes by hand. It's been a couple days so the sink's started to reek. Something slimy stuffed with sulfur ash and coffee grounds. I turn the water and the basin starts to fill. I can tell from the electric hum that something's stuck. I move the dirty dishes to the left basin then I roll up my sleeves and stick my hand down the murky yellow water into the disposal itself.

Take a deep breath.

Push your fingers through a pool of grainy slime and mush at the bottom of the chamber. Work around, feeling for something. Soft waterlogged scraps of peppers and cucumber. Meat lumps and egg bits. Ring finger graces something slimy and smooth. Yank it firmly, trying at it from a couple of different directions. Dislodging it from the metal mesh of the chamber. Pull out, hand dripping in muck. See the chicken bone between your gooey fingers, coated in dark green and beige. Flick the disposal with your other hand and hear the engine whirr to life. Watch the water spiral downward. Chuck the bone into the trash flicking bits of filth around the polyethylene off your fingers.

Rinse it off and work your way through the rest of the pile.

x x x

*Click.*

She spreads her legs out in a V as the other girl works a lubed gloved finger into her ass. Slow at first. One, then two. She moans and arcs her back and sighs. Three now. A little faster. She pulls her fingers

out and her asshole gapes hungrily. She leans close and spits right into the void of her cherry pink gape.

*Click.*

This teacher takes this schoolgirl to a room with straps dangling from the ceiling. He ties her hair up and ties her arms back. Puts her in a harness, then hoists her up to her toes. Swings her feet over stirrups so her skirt rides up over her ass. No underwear underneath but she's still wearing thigh-highs and Chucks. Her cock bulges bright red ruby out the seams of the tiny metal cage. It looks like it's about to *explode*.

*Click.*

Poppers smell like all 31 flavors of Baskin-Robbins melted out a busted freezer and the industrial grade chemicals they'd use to clean the mess up.

They don't hit quite like they used to.

Six hundred sixty six decibel cloud grips me by the back of the skull. Reaches in through the back past the skin, scraping nails on my vertebrae, slithering down my esophagus.

Pried open my third eye again, tinged with migraine. Remember: This is a holy experience. Witness God through the pattern grid world of the monitor. Hear the angel song escape her lips.

I can't stay here very long these days. Built up a tolerance through overexposure. Comedown is quick these days. Drowned out in waves of nausea. Turn on motion blur and crank up the gamma. I go soft in my hand again.

*Click.*

x x x

She drifts through the jagged teeth of the tombstones and crumbling mausoleums over the rolling hills by the lake and picking flowers. Like some degrading VHS, tracking out of sync.

I dump the ashes and repack my bowl.

Heather's weed was always loud as fuck. Makes real life look almost

like the movies. Coated in 35mm film grain, flickering at 24 frames per second. Bathed in a Michael Mann candy glow. It's like 27%; real heavy shit. Nintendo 64 outputting 240i to a CRT type vision.

I thought it was just the light that made her look like that.

When you step out from the shade of a tree into a blistering summer sun everything goes washed out like used tape boxes at video rental chains. The ones you can tell were on the shelf right next to the window.

I try to walk someplace else just to keep her at a distance. But she always shows up somewhere. By the edge, by the fence. Throwing coins into the fountain.

Every day I see her she gets a little bit closer and closer.

Today was the first I'd seen her close enough to make out the features of her face.

x x x

Hey.

Eyes shining like fossilized amber. Cheshire cat grin, swinging her legs off the side of the mossy mausoleum. She caught me off guard, but I don't feel startled at all. It's like I knew she was there before she even said a thing.

Come here often?

Nice pick up line.

What 'cha reading?

Her voice is lilting and fae-like. She leaps from the stone and holds her body like a *Sailor Moon* villain.

It's, uh. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Carson McCullers.

What's it about?

You know. Typical old sad girl type of shit.

Well. That sounds fun.

Fun is one way to describe it.

She smirks playfully and looks around to make sure the coast is clear.

You wanna smoke some weed?

I mean. hat's kind of why I come here in the first place.

x x x

She takes me to the big mausoleum at the center of the cemetery. Grassy knolls and scattered tombstones give way to stairways and stone fountains and slatted ledgerstone paneling. Big gray boxes jutting out of the hillside, looking like a crashed UFO.

She runs her fingers along one side I've never seen before and finds a handle that blends in seamlessly with the wall.

This is the side entrance, she says. It's only employees supposed to know about it. But it's usually dead in there when no one getting laid to rest.

I trail behind her past endless white marble corridors tiled floors and glass. We shuffle down a floor. She hops on a railing and slides down like Mary Poppins.

You ever been down here before?

No, not really.

She takes me down another flight of stairs. I stop at the bottom to catch my breath.

I didn't know it went so deep.

There's not that far to go now, promise.

x x x

We slip through yet another secret back door and turn left into a room with glossy dark blood orange tiles and pale marble walls. At the center is a stone bench. She spins around playfully and her laugh echoes off the walls.

Um. What's your name, by the way?

You waited this long to ask me that?

Smile like a shark, another off-guard stare. Her eyes glow violet beneath the shadow in the corner of the room.

It's Claudia, by the way. I mean, at least. That's the most recent one we've got.

That's cool.

I sit on the bench and stare at the marble on marble grids wallpapering either long side of the room, leading towards intricate, shallow hieroglyphics of nephilim and seraphs and wheels of fire set within wheels of fire.

Well. I'm Alessa.

Very nice to meet you, Alessa.

She sits across from me on the bench.

I love your shirt, by the way.

She points at the big black and white pyramid of guts with the DNA strands spiraling out from the tip.

Is that like a band or something?

Yeah. It's, um. They're called Blood Incantation. They're like, uh, cosmic death metal?

I couldn't've made that logo out in a thousand years.

The more illegible it is the better the band.

Is that so? Well. We'll just have to take your word for it.

Now she's taking a silver cigarette case out of her bag. Finely engraved with an interweaving, delicately lined field of flowers, wolves, and butterflies. She opens it up and takes out a pre-rolled joint.

You're very cute by the way.

She lights it and passes it to me but I'm so flustered I almost forget to take it.

Ah, ha. Ha. Gosh.

You know why I took you all the way down here?

I cough and pass it back to her. The chamber fills up with a purplish-green *Silent Hill* fog.

You know why all these walls here are empty? Nothing's been

engraved?

She takes a fat drag and dumps ashes the joint on the expensive looking tile.

It's because they haven't worked their way down here yet. This is like one of the few places here that's, like. *Actually* empty. We're the furthest bodies down. Isn't that wild? There are like a thousand people in this complex, and only us here left alive.

She smiles and passes me the tail end of the joint before opening up her cigarette case and sparking up another.

You want to know how long we've been watching you.

Couple months now?

Gosh. You're so fucking pretty.

I blush redder still and accidentally blow out the end of this roach. Garnet sparks scatter out and land on her dress, burning tiny little holes in the fabric, sending tiny little smoke signals.

Oh fuck, you alright?

Yeah, you're good. Sorry, I didn't mean to get you all flustered.

No, it's fine, ah. I'm just. Um.

Nervous?

Ha ha. What could've given that away?

I mean. We can smell it all over you.

Whatever, weirdo.

It's not the only thing we can smell on you.

x x x

Her lips taste like crushed ice, liquor and salt.

I can't tell if she's *actually* that cold or if it's just the bench we're making out on.

I lied. I know ]she *is* that cold, somehow, but the truth is I don't want to think too hard about the why or hows right now.

I haven't wanted it this bad in a very long time.

She grabs me by the wrists, pins one hand down over my head and

guides the other to her cock.

You feel that?

It's big enough I couldn't miss it if I tried.

*Oh.*

So she does have a pulse.

You're wet.

She smiles and grabs my hair and arches my neck back and sucks on my tongue as she guides my hand around her dick.

So you like it rough.

I stroke her gently as she nibbles at my throat.

You're *very* wet.

She works my stockings down and rubs me through my panties and spits in my mouth and slaps me. My noise reverberates off the walls. I imagine someone hearing us and bite my lip. I imagine steps coming down the hall and glance at the doorway.

Hey.

She grabs me by the jaw and turns me and stares me dead in the eye.

Don't look away.

The sound of her hand on my cheek echoes loud enough to bring me back to her.

We're up here.

Twin suns orbiting above me searing into my retinas. She spits in my face so I turn a darker shade of scarlet.

Good girl.

I wince and feel icy fingers work their way up my shirt, feel them pinch and twist at my nipple until I can't hold back making any noise any more.

There you go. Just let it out.

*Fuck.*

No one's gonna find you here.

This had to be fake. Maybe staged. There had to be cameras somewhere. Like this was one of those public hookup videos where they

have to blur out the girl's face.

Come back here.

She pulls my panties to the side and my clit pops out.

It's okay, she smiles.

She slips down under me, puts my legs over her shoulders.

I feel something cold and wet against my taint.

Relax.

Claudia goes back down and licks my ass like a candy wrapper. I grasp the sides of the bench and arch backwards. She cups my balls and gasps for air.

Calm down. Let it go.

I pant and gulp and try my best to slow my breathing.

Gods. You're delicious.

Fuck I want you inside me.

The words feel dumb coming out my lips but she just looks up over at me and smirks. The audacity. But if anything she's flattered. Icy fingers press themselves against my hole.

Whatever you want, babe.

She sticks the tip of her tongue in my asshole and I finally can feel her warmth. She works it in there gently, with care and patience. And yeah I'm scared as hell but I'm so damn tired of running off inside myself or envisioning this in second-person.

I don't want to fight it anymore.

All the sudden the glow builds and I feel something hard and slick like glass at the rim coated wet with slime. Lube? I feel pressure, let out a little moan as I feel the heat well up inside me. My anus encloses around as it begins to expand from within.

She sits up dripping pink slime down from her pale blue lips all over my semisoft clit and the marble. A smile crawled across her face.

Ha, ha, what the fuck?

She stands up and wipes her mouth and grins and I start to wonder what the fuck she just slipped inside me.

What did you just do to me? I stumble off the bench to my knees

and feet and slip my panties back up over my drooling clit.

You said you wanted me inside of you.

My guts expand and burble. Bloating slightly as the heat works its way up slithering along my vertebrae. It tickles and I can't hold back a laugh and a burp. My guts sting like salt on a wound, bubble and scrape like pop rocks in Coke.

I remember that grease burn I watched that one kid get all over him when he knocked over the bacon on the cooling tray and the steaming liquid fat just pouring all over down his back. I belch again and feel dizzy and lightheaded. My body feels like churning cement mixer. Knots untie in my guts like pulling pork apart. A lump rises up in my throat.

I know this might feel strange, she says. It might even hurt a little. But now you'll never be alone.

The mausoleum is spinning, different spectrum wavelengths compositing the grayscale marble decoupling so every single distinctive element has its halo, a little ghostly rainbow trailing behind. The muscles in my back spasm goosebumps all over.

What the *fuck* did you do to me?

We chose you because you asked for this, she says.

I lurch and lean against the wall for support.

You don't think we can't smell the hunger on you?

Up comes my breakfast. The coffee, the pancakes, the syrup, the fruit, those little pink and blue pills. Greenish yellow bile billows and splashes into a steaming mush on the floor until my stomach is empty.

All that time in isolation. Withering away for someone else. Trying to make yourself as small as possible. Alone.

I reel again, and I feel every muscle in my body seize up. Knees lock, sweat pours down my brow, my earlobes, my quivering lips. Feverish burning up inside but my outline shivering cold. My throat bulges as I feel something thick lumping up against my soft palate.

Don't you want to feel like a part of something *bigger* than you?

Up comes a pinkish cord, and I retch and realize its my esophagus.

It breaks apart in glossy, fleshy ribbons with a splat, followed by a small, inverted, ridged ball, pink and orange, then these rippled, thin, stringy ribbons in my asphyxiated stupor I took for my intestines. Black and purple chunks of giblets spew out and steam as shaking fingers claw at my distended gut.

We know how long you've longed for this.

I reel again, and squeeze together even tighter.

Cough and gurgle and up comes the cartilage rings of my windpipe. Two soppy bulbous inverted sacks. Dark crimson still-beating heart trailing behind with the hundreds of thousands of ropy interweaving strings making up my circulatory system. Slop like wet cloth on concrete.

It's going to be okay now.

I go soft all over soon as I feel like I couldn't possibly have anything more to sweat. Try to gasp but I can't. All the empty spaces closing up inside. Calm and warm all through and over.

Feel it all melt and liquefy and spread. It's all you can do now that two thirds of you are splattered around the mausoleum like a Jackson Pollock piece. Unsocketed eyes resting in the pool of lime green puss squeezing out through all the pores like the rest of your deflated self was some one of those Play-Doh pasta makers.

Thank you.

She sticks her fingers in the flesh I shed, picking out bloody teeth from the soft pink flaps that used to be my gums. She sticks her hand down inside of me. Slides down and her elbow slips past my lips, then all the way to her shoulder. She stretches me over her head then down her sides until she disappears completely.

x x x

We take our sweet time cleaning up after ourselves. Next service isn't until tomorrow, after all. We hungrily swallow every part of our former self. Scoop what's left of the girl into our mouths like cake. Lick

the tile clean. Stick our tongue into the crevices of the angels in the mural. Get between all the seams. Scrape bits of viscera from the lights on the ceiling with our tongues. Not a drop of us left behind.

Up the stairs and back into the light. Across the field, past the jagged tombstones as the sun sets on the horizon.

We remember where we sleep at night.



WISPLASH

# SEVEN

Jodie & Aya had a whole house to themselves but were lately running dry outta people to fuck including each other. Sure they used to hook up in the past, bonded by a mutual disgust in their common ex; but after spending so long living together they'd eventually grown bored of what they had to offer for each other sexually. Sure they'd watch porn together sometimes but their mutual masturbation had become strictly platonic.

They had too much on the line together to break up, and too much drama for most girls to want to spend time there.

But Aya thought a hurricane party was an exciting enough proposition to trap girls like herself in a situation where they'd be much more likely to say "Yes" than the "No" she usually got. She had half a sheet of acid and an ounce of weed and a bunch of liquor and a shortlist of women she wanted really bad to fuck but not enough to ask out on a date.

In a small town like this it's hard not to run into your exes. Aya thought to leave her out of this, but she was looking rough. Like she hadn't slept in weeks.

"I mean... You sure it's okay?" Natalie took a stack of lunch meat from the deli bin. "You still live with... *her*." Natalie's breakup with Aya was a trainwreck by any measure but her one with Jodie had been even worse.

"Please," Aya said cheerfully. "That was years ago, and besides, I've already talked it over with her..."

But that was a fucking lie.

"What the fuck Aya," Jodie nearly spat out her beer.

"You know it's not good to be alone like that, I mean... she was antisocial before she met us, but... especially lately..."

"That's fucking retarded."

"What is it with you and that word?"

"I'm autistic, Aya, I'm allowed to say it, and besides... Fuck's sake, she said worse shit than me before. That girl is a fucking psychopath..."

"She's...she has BPD?"

"Okay, so she's a manipulative control freak... still..."

"I think you're being a bit ableist."

"How the fuck can I be ableist? I'm *literally* neurodivergent."

Aya took another bump.

"Look. I get to invite who I want. So do you. You don't like her that bad there's plenty of rooms to hang out, but... just. Give the girl a second chance."

Cherry had been planning on leaving Pensacola without saying goodbye. But now she couldn't sit right with pulling a French exit on her old life. She wanted to stick to the other plans she made, but now she'd been invited, she felt obliged to show. When was the next time she would see them again, realistically?

"Think you could give me a ride?" Cherry asked.

"I don't have a car anymore, remember?"

Of course. Everyone remembered last Christmas.

"Shoot. You still got Natalie's number?"

By the time she hung up, Cherry was regretting ever telling Jodie anything about the girls from Minnesota. She already knew Jodie's deal.

She was right, though. Jodie had her eye on those dykes from Minnesota for months now. She'd been stalking them on Twitter ever since Cherry told her all about them at the last party she saw her.

Eva didn't post a lot of selfies. But Alice did, and she seemed fuckable enough, if a bit predictable. Trans girls named 'Alice' exist only to prove trans girl stereotypes true or something. Whatever. Who gives a

damn. Alice was still hot as all shit. She was chomping at the bit to stick her tongue down that rabbit hole.

Cherry put on her best summer dress, pulled her *Master of Puppets* hoodie on over that, and put on as little makeup as she felt she could get away with.

At least it was still kind of nice out. It wasn't raining nearly as bad as Cherry had expected. Now all she had to do was wait. Natalie offered to pick her up at 4:20. Naturally, she promised to bring weed.

On that first night she met her, Natalie looked Cherry in the eye and told her with a smile: "Always remember never to trust me." The third time she met her, she told her the same exact thing again, because she'd completely forgotten those first two times they'd ever met.

They lived in the same dorms around that time. Didn't really do much but play *Smash Bros.* and *Halo*. They could tell even then that they wanted to be closer, but they were boys at the time, and they didn't want to seem gay.

No, Cherry didn't really start to get to know Natalie until the last year or so, and even then she only knew her from parties and a handful of her short stories she'd read out of morbid curiosity — she was obviously troubled, and troubled writers always wrote something *interesting*, at the very least.

But her violence bored the shit out of Cherry. Natalie's prose was sloppy, problematic, and puerile. She loved obscurity almost as much as she loved brutality; despite their shocking contents, her stories lacked clarity, always trailing off into nothing, never quite resolving themselves. Unsatisfying.

Cherry had heard the rumors, how she wrote murder fantasies about them in private, how she had a folder on her computer full of folders, each folder named after a different girl, each containing hundreds of thousands of words worth of dozens of imaginary deaths for each and every one of those names, every individual one of them

wholly unique, meticulously convoluted and graphically detailed. As word spread among the local queers her social circle grew smaller and smaller as she was slowly weeded from the conflicting social groups who just couldn't continue to separate art from the artist, especially when the art came at such expense to herself. God only knows what she's done to others.

Cherry suspected she'd spun those yarns herself. They were exactly the kind of stories she'd expect a girl like that would start herself; Andy/Charlie Kaufman mindfuck garbage you'd expect from any pretentious college dropout artist trying to obfuscate the implications of her work.

She pointed at the shiny metal object poking out from inside the pocket of Natalie's car door. "Is that a fucking *gun*?"

"Relax," Natalie says. "I'm not gonna shoot ya."

"The *fuck*..."

It was still hot as piss out, despite all the rain. This side of Florida bordered the Gulf of Mexico like an armpit, so it was always humid as shit all year round; even during the winter. The sun was low, golden rays splintered through the trees, and silver clouds drifted by beyond the pines.

"Shit, if you'd been through what I've been through you'd buy one too," she sneers. "Don't be such a fucking pissbaby."

Natalie pulls off the highway into a strip mall, then turns to Cherry and says, "Hey. You wanna go shoplift a liquor store?"

She played lookout as Cherry swiped a big bottle of Fireball and an even bigger bottle of gin into her messenger bag. Natalie then bought a case of PBR and some mixers to distract the cashier while Cherry swiped some minis from a display stand.

"That's the thing with mixers, Cherry." She turned the engine over and shook the raindrops from her hair. "Doesn't matter how many you bring. Shit always runs dry."

Laura was older than any of them, and so obnoxiously pretty Jodie knew Aya would have zero interest in trying to fuck her. She was one of those dysphoria-inducingly gorgeous cases. Something like Hunter Shafer and Hari Nef had a baby. Cruel of her, perhaps, but Jodie liked being cruel. And for her plus one Laura had gotten this girl Sophie's number at Emerald City the other week: British (*hot*), blue hair, 't4t' tattooed across the knuckles of her left hand. She couldn't hardly believe she'd only started hormones just 8 months ago and already looked like that.

She seemed to sing when she spoke.

"Thanks for the ride!" Laura didn't think to tell her that outfit made her look just like Daria. "What an American concept..."

"This is the South, sweetheart." Laura took another hit of her vape. "Here we like to act like we're all indestructible."

"I mean shit's already complicated enough..."

Laura had just gotten settled in with a drink when there was another knock at the door. Cherry and Natalie were shivering and soaked; their raincoats had done nothing to keep them dry.

"Sophie, this is Cherry, Natalie..."

"Hiya," Sophie waved.

Cherry sat on the couch and instinctively ripped the big bong sitting on the table. Thunder rattled the windows, box fans buzzing on high struggling to bring any relief from the suffocating humidity.

"I think the other girls are upstairs," Laura says.

"Thanks for the heads up," Natalie yawns. "Where's the booze?"

Natalie found her exes in Aya's bedroom, the one with the *Ghost in the Shell* poster hanging on the door. They were sitting on the bed beneath a projector, watching piss fetish porn cast against the cigarette-yellowed wall. The room smelled like burned plastic — "Is that DMT?" Natalie asked, noticing the bowl on the bed stand.

"Yea you want some?" Aya offered.

On the screen before them, two girls dressed up in latex to look like bunnies are having their asses stretched out and expanded with toys, prolapsed, spit and pissed in.

“Hell yea,” Natalie replies, sitting on the bed beside them.

Death Grips was playing on the speaker on the bedside table: *“HOW THE TRIP NEVER STOPS ON AND ON IT’S BEYOND INSANE / WHY I SET MYSELF UP IN A RAGING SEA OF FLAMES”*

Natalie grabs the glass pipe from Jodie and turns away from the screen. “Can I tell you two something kinda embarrassing?” she asks.

“Wouldn’t be the first time...”.

“I uh... I stopped watching trans porn a couple months ago,” Natalie flicks the lighter gently. “I used to, I could, but lately it’s just,” she laughs. “Like, all I’ve been jacking off to these days is cishet shit. Not even anything good, really, just basically whatever’s on the front page of Pornhub. So, like, lotta barely legal teenage step fantasy garbage. It’s all fucking disgusting, which is probably why it gets me off...”

“Sorry,” she chuckles. “I’m just fucking with you.”

But in reality, she hadn’t said a word to anyone.

She hits the pipe with a torch lighter, slow, deep, and hard, holds it in her lungs, harsh milky smoke, fighting the urge to cough, then hands the pipe and the torch to Aya, counts the seconds, glimpses latex gloved fingers in a girl’s ass as the girl’s getting sucked off in the corner of her eye, as a beautiful hum starts to fill the room, the same sound you hear when you die, this lovely note that floods the space like a weighted blanket, like you wanna follow it out from this mortal coil, inward, and she blinks, and everything is becoming a cartoon, and it’s eyes as far as she can see wrapped around her, fur and skin and living flesh, room expanding gently, squirming, blinking, looking down at her, foggy entities drifting by as the room swells and bulges, as the music and the words around her are broken down into baser components, garbled fragments like building blocks of language as polyester graffiti littering the infinitely expanding ceiling, and as she exhales out her dry throat her

body tingles, emanating through her heart to her extremities, she feels as if she's about to piss herself, not just from her dick but out the pores of her body, the colors prismatic, impossibly warped, and she feels like she's going to fall through the bedsheets, but instead she falls into herself, into nothing, and she closes her eyes, and she's in this impossibly massive ventriculated space, this floating realm of shifting neon patterns stretched over the walls of a massive cavity, swirling the surface of this cavernous liquid black velvet chrome sphere where up is down and everything is made up from flashing casino iconography, swirling solid shapes, visual klaxons, both reminiscent and unlike familiar clipart cutting blacklight platonic plasticine concepts, metal on wet, glimmering, electronic, and she felt like she might die, or maybe even just go insane, like her brain was tangibly breaking, she couldn't parse any of this, breathing in and out beneath that hum, some reassurance she's still alive, hearing the room from a distance but choosing not to follow back, floating here instead with these translucent entities, gazing through her without seeing, worming their way around her, inside her, warping her head, soothing branching fractal fingers, alien and indescribable, rippled bubble foam holographic shadow-glass impressions of lifeforms, and her mind started drifting back to her, and as she drifted back into the room, she felt a wetness between her legs, a lovely warmth, and she imagined back where her body was she was being taken advantage of, that Aya and Jodie were groping and molesting her unconscious body, that they were stripping her down, and turning her over, and pressing her face into the mattress, pulling her panties down, one of them working quickly to get inside of her while she's unconscious, filling her anus with her warm, familiar cock, hot, sticky wetness, lube trickling between her cheeks, gripping her waist, raping her gently as the other roughly chokes her, hair falling over her face with every thrust, and then the fingers around her throat are razor wire, sharp, stabbing bits of metal digging into her flesh, and blood and shit is running down her leg as she's raped, as the wire tightens around her throat, cutting off her breath, and whichever one of them is

strangling her starts moving it back and forth like a crude saw, digging deeper and deeper through the soft tissues surrounding her neck, cutting through arteries and veins and her trachea, shredding them, gushing blood onto the sheets, and she feels it dripping down her neck, down her tits, as she's filled from the other end with her hot load, blissful numb dripping through her, nails digging deep into her in her sides as someone else stabs her, perforates her, punctures her lungs and liver and intestines through her rib cage, as finally the razor wire around her neck reaches the vertebrae, as it tightens deeper into the gap between the two, separating them, pulling them apart slowly, as it finally completes its work and severs all feeling from everything, her head rolling out and away from her body, staring back at their impossibly cruel, unfathomable evil and violence, countless painted faces, dead eyes staring back across the sheets at her limp, lifeless body, surrounded by an ocean of laughing clowns.

When she comes back she's staring blankly at the sheets, tracing their textures with her eyes, slowly figuring out how language works.

"You okay?" Jodie asks, tenderly laying a hand on her back.

"Yea, I." Natalie feels at her crotch. "I always feel like I'm pissing myself."

Meanwhile, elsewhere, Laura was building a gravity bong in the kitchen with a pitcher, some scissors, an empty bottle of Mountain Dew and some tinfoil. Soon she was taking turns with Cherry and Sophie getting extremely fucking high.

"Is th—" Laura saw the tattoo on Sophie's left arm, right beneath the crook. "Is that what I think it is?"

It was a triangle with a circle in the middle and a line splitting it down in half. Cherry stares. "Is that the fuckin' Deathly Hallows tattoo?"

Sophie pulls up her sleeve, "Well, yea," revealing it's been modified crosses and arrows — amalgamating it with the trans symbol. "What can I say?" she smiles. "I'm a bit of a fangirl."

"You know." Cherry nearly threw up from that giant hit she just exhaled. She steadies herself on a bleached wooden chair, coughs and coughs, "That's, like. Uh."

Sophie swallows. "Look I know Rowling was problematic. But I grew up on it, and ever since she took her life, well." she coughs. "Reclamation is important."

"It's just, I think," Laura snickers. "When I see people walking around with that tattoo, I think 'white supremacists', I think 'TERF'—"

"That's what I meant, 'reclaim!' That's why I modified it! Rowling is *far* too good for people like *that*." She pours herself a drink on the counter. "I mean, I honestly think people are gonna look back on her like other suicides... Lovecraft... Hemingway... Marilyn Manson..."

"As in, she was a racist?" Cherry says.

"As in," Sophie mulls it over. "As in she left behind a somewhat complicated legacy. But also, I think there's something about what's popular that's worth looking into. Like, why did *Harry Potter* resonate with so many, why did it ever become such a phenomenon? Why are we still making movies? I dunno, I just find it all morbidly fascinating..."

"Like, the same ways how Disney's recent films serve as a reflection of liberal brainworm end-times monopoly capitalism. But *Harry Potter* is far better than Disney; way better than most queers give it credit. And fairly feminist."

Laura gives her a weird look and chuckles. "Alright, sure. Fine. Okay. Whatever."

Natalie stumbles into the kitchen, a little shaky, voice weak. "Yoooo. Y'all made a gravity bong?"

Cherry eyed Natalie over; obviously the tallest girl at the party. Fucking Leo, towering arrogantly above them. She looked like some kind of stoner witch in her old cardigan and skinny jeans. Cherry watched her take a gravity bong rip so heavy she had to stop for a second, sit down and stick her head between her knees just so she wouldn't puke.

Aya and Jodie stood by the door to the garage smoking cigarettes, watching the water slowly creep in through the entrance. The garage door itself had been drawn all the way up on its mechanism, and they were staring at the wasp's nest buzzing high on the wall near the lip.

The acid Aya took earlier was starting to kick in. Everything was breathing slowly and starting to glow fluorescent beneath the surface, swaying in time to her heartbeat like a ship on the ocean.

Cherry borrows a cigarette from Laura when she catches her chain smoking in the patio.

"You know that girl?"

"Hmm?"

"Sophie."

"Oh no she's with that exchange program right?"

The sun was starting to set, though they could only observe the changing of the colors through the storm haze. Every now and again lightning crashes, flashing blinding light through the screen windows.

All the furniture was wicker and cushions, except the table was made of glass. There was a tiny TV atop a white wooden cabinet with a yellowed SNES attached. Laura looked at the games they had then blew in an *NBA Jam* cart and turned the system on.

"I dunno what it is about that girl but she just feels... off." She offers Cherry a controller.

Cherry gets a text from Eva and Alice that they're staying in tonight. "Well, shoot," she sighs.

"What's up?"

"It's, um. Nothing." She stares off out towards the sunset.

Natalie shows Sophie the knife. "Wild, ain't it?" It glistened in the low light of the living room, a rainbow whorl, shifting colors as she tilts it in her hands. "This is the same exact one Laura Palmer had in *Fire Walk With Me*."

"Really?" Sophie tilts her head. "I don't remember a knife."

“Huh.” She chuckles. “Could’ve sworn she had one. Maybe I made that one up.” She was playing them stoner doom metal over the aux. “How do I say this without sounding like a freak. It’s, um. Nevermind. Forget about it.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s nothing, just talking to myself.”

“Ah.” Sophie gets up, heads to the kitchen, makes herself another drink. “Okay.” Natalie follows her close behind.

Natalie looks at the knife and imagines plunging it deep into her skin. She imagines running deep red lines all up and around her skinny little body. She imagines the resistance of her flesh, the knife working through her, severing her circulatory system, bumping up against bone and ligament with each thrust. She wonders which parts of her are the softest. Maybe her neck or her tummy. She imagines what it looks and smells like as she splits it wide open and spills her stomach out onto the floor. She seems so delicate, it wouldn’t be anything —

Natalie thought to close the blade and pocket it before Sophie noticed her still looking at it behind her.

“Are you single?” Sophie asks.

“I mean. Ha.” Natalie nervously rubs the back of her neck. “Well, yea, more or less...”

“I see.” She opens up a big bag of Flamin’ Hot Cheetos and starts shoving them into her mouth. “Figures.”

Natalie looks confused. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Sophie shrugs and gestures with cheese-crust fingers. “Just look at the crowd here. AGP central.” She returns to the living room, takes up space on the corner of the couch, and goes back to texting on her phone.

“The fuck is *that* supposed to mean?”

“Means you can go fuck yourself, love.”

“What?”

“Look. It is obvious you’re just a bunch of self-centered white women want validation in surrounding themselves with other versions of themselves they can fuck.” She snorts. “Maybe groom.”

“Sweetie. *You’re* a white woman?”

“See? That’s what I mean. You just *assume*. I could be indigenous”

“From the UK?”

“My parents could be immigrants...”

“I mean, are they?”

“Now you’re just being racist.”

“...Am I? I don’t know anything about you...”

“At the very least confrontational...”

“I haven’t said *anything*.”

“You don’t remember? When you first came in, and I said we should do a pronouns circle and you muttered ‘Tenderqueer’ under your breath...”

Natalie racks her brain. “I don’t remember doing that.”

“Well, I do. So.” She licks the Cheeto dust off her fingertips,

Laura looked Cherry over. She seemed so fragile in the moonlight, her lithe, skeletal frame carved out from shadow, angles caught in the flickering lightning. Cherry shrunk into the corner of the wicker two-seater, turning away shyly, blushing.

“Hey,” Laura crept closer. “Y’wanna make out?”

“Uhm, heh, uhh.”

“It’s okay if you say no,” Laura smiles.

“I just.” Cherry clears her throat. “I dunno if that’d be such a good idea...”

“We can keep it casual, you know, it’s whatever”

“That’s okay, I just.” she trails off. “Maybe I’m old-fashioned. But I feel like something like a kiss really ought to be a bit more sacred than that.”

Laura shuts off the SNES and looks down at her from the light of the blue-screened TV.

"You didn't have to explain, you know? You could've just said 'No'..."

"I'm sorry, I—"

Laura lights the half a cigarette she set aside for later.

"You don't got nothing to be sorry about," she exhales.

Cherry stirs, scratches her shoulders, bringing herself further inward, curls into a ball. "I just... I know myself, I always end up regretting it later. I wish I could just let myself go."

"Cherry. You're a really sweet girl. Honest. But I think you're thinking about this shit way too hard." She takes another drag. "I've met lots of people just like you. Artists, poets, philosophers; whatever. Trying to make everything something significant. Here's the thing though: There ain't no such thing as 'higher truth.' There ain't no such thing as 'sacred.'"

Jodie found Natalie and Sophie watching the storm fall from the front porch and trying to set stuff on fire with a grill lighter.

"Hey, easy," Natalie says as she wrenches the lighter from Sophie's hands. "Everything's wet as shit anyways, ain't nothing gonna burn." Sophie hands it to her, takes her shoes off and runs off dancing in the rain.

"What's that girl's problem?" Natalie rubbed her temple with her gun. Jodie saw the gun and immediately snatched it from her.

"Hey, relax," Natalie grinned, stinking of vodka. "It ain't even loaded."

Well, it was loaded just a few minutes before Jodie came outside. Sophie told Natalie how there wasn't any guns in the UK as she nicked the rainbow knife out from Natalie's pocket. "Shit, really?" Natalie says, oblivious. "No wonder y'all lost the Revolution." So Natalie lined up some nearby cans and glass bottles on the railing for her to blow apart.

"Don't tense up your elbows," Natalie says. "You gotta be careful; estrogen weakens your bone structure. Stay loose, or you'll shatter your forearms with the recoil."

Laura found Aya watching skate videos on mute. Water started coming through the screens and pooling up on the hardwood, so she'd gone around and shut all the windows and turned the fans off.

"Hey babe," Laura says.

Aya spins around, eyes wide, "*Jesus Christ*," she hisses through clenched teeth, "you scared the *shit* outta me."

Laura made note just how wide and dilated her pupils were. "What are you, high?" she asked.

"I ate a whole strip; you were there." Her stomach growled. "Wasn't there supposed to be more girls here? Or..."

"Oh, yea, no, Cherry just heard back from those Minnesota chicks, I guess they're both staying in?"

"Well. That sucks." She kicks the air.

"They're watching *The Swimmer*."

"Oh, right. Good movie."

"Is there anyone here we haven't tried fuck yet?" The ivy floral wallpaper ripples and slides all over and Aya wonders just how many cigarettes it took to make it that specific, sickly shade of yellow. "You know. *Besides* the Brit."

Laura sat beside her. "Didn't you and Cherry hook up once? Or did I dream that..."

"No, we did." She can hear her eyes roll. "We did a bunch of poppers, and she was, like, really into it for, like, a minute, but then she just... she kinda zoned out in me. Like she was *gone*. It felt like fucking a corpse, and I just... I pulled out. I couldn't deal. And then she just didn't say nothing."

Just then there's a knock at the door.

Laura answers. "Hello?"

Lightning crashes dramatically behind the pizza guy in the doorway. He's soaking fucking wet.

"C-can I u-use y-your phone?"

“Shit, uhh...” Fuck. “Aya.”

“M-my car broke d-d-down and uhhh mm m-m-mine’s all w-w-wet.”

“What.” Aya turned from the TV. “Oh, oh my gosh, are you okay? What’s your name? Shit. Come in! Uhh, here, Laura?” Aya grabs the boxes from the guy and shoves them into Laura’s arms. “Here. Take care of this. *Fuck*.” She points at the boy. “Take your shoes off, come, follow me. You’re soaking fucking wet.”

She took him upstairs and showed him the bathroom and gave him a towel. “You can just throw your clothes over the rail; I’ll get some you can borrow.” He stripped down naked and dried off and heard a knock at the door. “Hey, I’m slipping some stuff through, holler if it don’t fit, okay? Promise I won’t peep.”

“What’s going on?” Jodie peeped through her bedroom door; the one with the *Nightmare on Elm Street* poster. She’d been doing bumps of k in there with Natalie and Cherry and watching rap videos.

“Pizza’s here,” she crosses the hall to her bedroom. “Downstairs!”

Aya opened the bathroom door a notch and set a worn *Fullmetal Alchemist* shirt and some sweatpants on the counter.

“What’s your name?”

Natalie devoured Hawaiian on her own. The boxes were soaked through but everything was still hot and gooey.

“Want some?”

Cherry shook her head. “I fucking hate pineapple.”

You know it makes your cum taste really fucking good?”

“You eat your own cum?” Cherry frowns.

“You don’t?”

Johnny disappeared to the back porch to call AAA. He was so pissed — his boss told him they were gonna close early, but the orders kept coming, so they just kept the kitchens running. Whatever. At least he was drunk.

What the hell was he even doing here?

Laura comes out through the door.

"Hey, kid," she says.

"Oh! Your phone!"

"Thanks," she exhales. "You get a tow?"

"Yeah, ha. They said they can't send no one out until tomorrow."

"Bummer, huh."

"Yeahhhhhh."

"Yea, well. Look. We're about to watch a movie, wanna join?"

"Is that," he looks her over, and tries to imagine what she looked like from before. "I mean, I literally don't know anyone here. You sure that's cool?"

"I mean," Laura shrugs. "You seem smart enough not to pull anything stupid. Besides, it's gonna be kinda weird to just leave ya out here by yourself."

Aya pored over the DVD shelf for a while as everyone else chattered idly, then put on *Belly* after asking around and realizing she was the only one there besides Jodie who'd ever seen it. "Are you fuckin' kidding me, Laura? How the *fuck* haven't you seen this?"

"And it's such a shame, too... it's fucking brilliant..." She slides the Blu-Ray into her PS3. "You know it was supposed to be the first of a series? Like, imagine if Kevin Smith's 'Askewniverse' didn't suck shit. I mean, this is Hype fucking Williams we're talking about. Guy's a goddamn genius. Every time I watch this movie I wish every movie looked exactly like this movie; it's *unreal*. And last I checked this got, what, 27% on Rotten Tomatoes?"

"Aya," Jodie interrupts. "Just play the movie."

Sophie snuggled up with her on the couch. Natalie kept making eyes from across the other side of the L-bend. Cherry was sitting next to her, shrunk away in the armrest.

As DMX is monologuing over a montage of Satanic ritual, as the camera shifts into a blacklight strobing nightclub over an acapella of

“Back to Live (However Do You Want Me)” by Soul II Soul, Natalie turns to Cherry, leans in, whispers in her ear: “*Hey. You wanna cuddle?*”

“*Ha, sure.*”

About halfway through the film, Sophie does the same to Jodie, and they disappear upstairs.

Just before the credits end, Aya receives a text from Jodie.

‘tired as shit. going to bed for the night. ttyl <3’

Sophie comes back down the stairs, looking a bit rustled up.

No one else knows about what she’s just done. She was very thorough washing the blood from her hands. No one else could smell it on her. She had been thorough with getting herself clean. No one else knew Jodie was dead.

# SIX

Johnny kept thinking about going upstairs to jack off, just to get the poison out, since it *had* been so very long since he jizzed, but then he remembered this was some stranger's house, and that would probably be a little weird? So by the time he got to the bathroom he just didn't. Taking a leak made him soft again, then he headed back downstairs and tried with renewed resolve to keep his eyes glued to the TV.

Cherry was melting into a warm, gooey puddle. Breathing in Natalie's smell — apple shampoo, weed, cigarettes, whiskey, Teen Spirit. It was all so very... nice. Through the fog of the ketamine, she imagines this feels something almost just like heaven.

Natalie turns and whispers in her ear: "*Hey. Wanna go someplace a little more private?*"

Cherry nearly chickens out on her. But she takes a deep breath and finds her resolve. What did Laura tell her now?

They disappear onto the back porch. Natalie looks at her in the dark, wind howling, thunder rumbling in the distance; Cherry got weak, but couldn't make a move. She just stood there staring back at her like a doe in the headlights.

"Sorry, I..." Cherry's voice quivers.

Natalie gently sets her fingers on her lips. "Don't be."

Cherry pouts. "You don't understand. I always get here and..."

"You don't have nothing to be sorry about."

"I'm so fucking *stupid*," she sours. "I *really* thought that I—"

Natalie shoves her back on the wicker couch. She descends upon her. Before Cherry can even process this their lips touch. Tongues flicker, gently wrapping themselves around each other. Down her throat. Spreading her jaws open. Natalie squeezes her breast, and she lets

out a sound, arches back, softer, easing the tension in her body, *and just like that...*

“*Wait*,” Natalie gasps, sitting up straight.

“What’s wrong?”

She wipes her mouth on her arm, pouts and looks out through the screen door, as if there’s someone standing there just outside the screen. “I can’t...” She gets up from on top of her.

“I— I’m sorry,” Cherry moans weakly. “Too much teeth?”

“No it’s not that,” Natalie catches her breath. “You’re actually *really good*. It’s just.” She sighs. “It’s hard to explain.” She rubs her eyes. “Like kissing a sister?”

Not even five minutes after the movie was over the power went out. Aya knew this would probably happen at some point. She used the flashlight on her phone to find the candles in the kitchen and everyone else helped her set them out methodically as the pulse breath crawling silk-worm darkness at the edges of the black pricked and brushed against her sensitive skin.

“Here we are now,” she smiles, bathing the room in flickering yellow. She goes about the dining room and living room, setting out the candles on plates and in jars.

Laura follows closely behind everyone else to help make sure none of this set-up is a safety hazard, making slight adjustments as she goes along.

Cherry cusses. “I forgot to charge my phone.” She was sitting on the same couch she’d shared with Natalie, albeit with a few feet of distance from her.

“Well, what now?” Sophie asks.

Johnny just sat quietly, awkwardly, feeling outta place, as everyone else idly chattered about what to do now.

“What about you, pink boy?” Laura asks.

He shrugs weakly, sighing, “Shit, I dunno.”

“Would you like to play a game?”

Laura brings out a case of beer. "Hamm's?" Cherry chuckles ironically. "The fuck is this, Minneapolis?"

Natalie interjects: "You know they recorded *In Utero* just outside of Minneapolis? Same studio PJ Harvey recorded *Rid of Me*..."

"Oh my God no one fucking cares Natalie." Laura syncs her phone to a Bluetooth speaker and hits play on some goth rock. "Fuckin', whatever. Ugh. Alright, I'll pick something. How y'all feel about Ring of Fire?"

"No, wait, don't tell me..." Sophie thinks. "King's Cup? Yes, I know this one..."

"Of course it is," Laura finds the deck at the table, sits down, and starts shuffling cards. In a mock British accent: "God save the queens."

So they drank deep into the night, like a blur, laughing and cussing and getting fucked up, until they're so drunk none of them could talk or even think straight. Aya watches from the sidelines, sipping a Gatorade, laughing her ass off at their bullshit. She's glad, despite everything, everyone seems to be having a good enough time.

At some point Cherry blacks out.

His tongue is down her throat, stubble bristling against her chin; she's liquid in his arms, arched over an unfamiliar bed; eyes have adjusted to darkness, but even still the contours of this room are filigree and shadow.

She's drunk. Like she always gets at parties. Except this time instead of puking in the back of a car she's spun over a mattress.

She can't remember how she let it get this far.

But she wanted it though. She hadn't stopped thinking about the boy, in the abstract, from the very moment he got here. Usually she didn't feel nothing about any boys, but there was a sweetness about him that set him apart. He seemed safe enough.

Who gives a shit. She wanted it rough.

She needs something inside of her. She wants to spread herself wide open for him. She wants him to turn her over and pull her dress up and

pull her panties to the side and spit in her ass and rail her as hard as his tiny cigarette arms will let him. She wants to feel him inside her, as deep as she can take him. She wants to get railed and creampie'd and gaped gaping and dripping cum out her hole in the dark. She wants to feel his sweat all over her. She wants his smell all over her back.

She wishes her fantasies were a little less mundane. He runs his fingers through her hair and clenches a handful in her fist and pulls tight, arching her neck back, kissing it, licking her jawline. She feels his hot, heavy breath, gasping, working his way to her collarbone before brushing up against her hoodie.

"Fuck this," he grunts, pulls it off of her head, dragging the dress along with it.

"You're *so* fuckin' hot," Johnny mumbles, kissing her again.

"*Wait, wait,*" Cherry pants, fumbling to undo her bra.

Johnny rushes his fingers behind her, undoing the hooks, tearing the bra off her perky little tits. Tiny, plump red berries for nipples. "Sorry," Cherry gasps, "They're not much..."

"They're *perfect*," Johnny sucks them, *hard* — Cherry gasps, bites a finger, a single tear trailing down her cheek. His fingers, hands quivering, holding firm to her waist; she arches back, onto the bed — Johnny follows.

"Can I touch you?"

Cherry nods.

His fingers rub her soft clit gently through white-and-pink striped panties. They run along the cotton: "*Fuck*. You're already wet."

As he's sucking on her cock, a stillness falls over her. She arches up blankly at the ceiling, completely silent. Johnny finds this all unnerving.

"What's wrong?" she asks, staring up at him in the shadows.

He muttered something in reply; it was hard for Cherry to tell in her inebriated state. Something about he was sorry, he'd never done this before, he was nervous, or whatever; the intention was impossible to parse for either of them. Really, Johnny really didn't know what came over him.

So he bailed.

Laura and Aya were chilling in her bedroom.

“God I’m so fucking tired,” Aya drooled. The candles were burning low; they were listening to old Radiohead CDs on her old boombox and smoking from a bubbler.

“What a weird night,” Laura said.

“Nothing really happened, though,” Aya coughed and passed it to Laura.

“Thank Christ,” she took a hit.

“Well, I mean, I dunno.” She turns to the window. “Could get worse, still.” She yawns. “With the noise I don’t think I could sleep if I wanted to.”

“Told you acid was a bad idea.”

“Shut up. Shut up shut up shut up.” She pouts. “Hey,” she leans closer to Laura.

“Hey, that tickles...” Aya nuzzled the back of her neck. “Stop...” she giggles.

Aya doesn’t stop. She rolls her over, mounts her, kisses her neck, runs her hands up her arms, holds her wrists to the mattress, kisses her, mouth wide, shoving her tongue between her teeth.

She holds Laura’s wrists to the bed with one hand and unbuckles her jeans with the other. Unzips and yanks them down. Rubs her clit through her panties.

Laura gasped between kisses: “Stop.” She wriggles, trying to turn her head away. “I said stop.”

“Make me.”

“Aya, please,” she struggles, trying to free herself.

“I know you want it,” Aya says.

“No— *Stop*—” Aya keeps shoving her fingers down her throat to shut her up. Laura jerks and pulls violently off to the side, slipping over the edge of the bed, onto the floor, pants around her ankles.

Aya looks down on her and catches her breath as the realization of what she's almost done settles over the room. 'Optimistic' fades into 'In Limbo.'

"Oh my God. I'm so sorry..." Aya let go, rolled over to the side. "I'm so sorry, fuck I didn't mean—"

"What the *fuck*, Aya."

"I'm sorry Laura I'm... I don't know what came over me—"

"*Not* okay," she fumes.

"I didn't— Fuck. I shouldn't have done that."

"Jesus Aya." Laura fixes her pants. "You almost raped me."

"I didn't mean to... I really hone—"

"Let's just not talk about this, okay?" Laura got to her feet. "I get it, Aya. You're drunk or stoned or whatever. It's." She heads quietly to the door. "I'm gonna go sleep on the couch," she says.

Sophie found Johnny out on the back porch. It was finally quiet; a break in the storm. Stars were just poking out from the fading clouds.

Beneath the shallow floodwater moonlight danced over the grass. Johnny was sitting against the wall, drinking vodka straight out the bottle. His face all red and swollen from the crying; though he didn't know why.

"You still up?" Sophie's voice cut through the dark. He turns, startled, pink hair glowing like a halo framed through the torn screen window by the moon. The cigarette falls out of his mouth onto the concrete right by the woven rug under the table.

"I thought you went to bed with that other girl," she steps over to him. "Are you okay?"

"I mean." He shrugs. "Not really, no." He picks the cigarette up and relights it.

"What's wrong?" Sophie asks.

"I don't wanna talk about it."

Sophie grabs him by the chin and draws his gaze to meet hers.

"Shh, shh. Don't say a thing."

He scoffs.

"I've seen that look in your eyes before," she says. "You've felt it your entire life. There's something wrong with your body. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad." She takes him by the hand. "You're just like us, aren't you. That's why you're crying. You're afraid to say what you truly are."

His lip quivers, tears welling up in his eyes.

Sophie presses her lips to his ear. "Don't you worry," she whispers. "Don't say a word." Suddenly there's a sharp stinging pain running down his arm. "It's all over now."

For a moment he's thought somehow he's pissed himself. A warm puddle pooling up around her ass and thighs. It smells like blood. His head gets light and his vision gets fuzzy. He tries to scream but he's suddenly much too weak to make a sound.

"You see now just how quickly it can happen?" Sophie grabbed his hand and used it to rub her cunt through her panties. He moans and drools. "You fucking pervert," she smiles, feeling his throbbing cock through his pants. "You disgust me." She pulls her panties to the side and pulls his cock through into her pussy.

Johnny's eyes roll back into his head. "No, not yet," she slaps him, grabs his hair. "You're not dying on me yet you fucking poof." She starts grinding, riding his cock, grabbing his throat, throttling him. Her pussy's wet from the smell of him dying.

At some point he stops breathing, and at another point Sophie notices. "*Fuck*," she moans, slaps him again, "*Oh fuck*," she moans. He's still warm, and he's somehow getting even *harder* now — his lifeless cock rocking gently against her cervix. "*No*," she humps him, "*don't*," falling back down, "*stop*," she grabs him by the hair, "*I'm*," she punches his stupid lifeless face, "*gonna*," bashes it in, "*cum*," over and over, "*fuck*," with the butt-end of Natalie's knife, "*shit*," Johnny's jaw gaping wide open, "*God*," red to violet, "*ugh*," blistering and gashing, "*yes*," exposing bone, "*mmm*," and his lifeless body starts to come, and she

bites her tongue, so she doesn't scream, taking every last drop of his dead body's discharge.

# FIVE

It was just like something out of one of her stories.

It reeked of death. Jodie was tied up to the bed frame, splayed out just exactly the same as how Natalie used to tie her up. She was naked and her belly had been slit open, insides spilling out, all purple and yellow in the moonlight of the open window.

Where her face once was was a mushy puddle of black and ruby. Blood had matted her hair, and her pubes, and the sheets. Her tits had been cut off, crudely, sloughed off on either side.

She wanted to scream. But she just couldn't find her voice. Instead a barely audible shriek escaped her throat.

She searched for her knife, but she couldn't find it. Perhaps, if she didn't remember doing this, she wouldn't have remembered where she put the knife? She was always hiding secrets from herself. Maybe she disposed of it already?

She couldn't stop staring at the body. She couldn't make sense of its form now, but all the pieces were still here. Only disjointed.

When did she do this? Her head spun. She couldn't remember doing this, but she could imagine herself going through the motions. Natalie stood there a while and imagined just how she'd have done it. She thought of just how easy it would be to sneak into her room. She knew Jodie never kept the door locked.

She would probably have choked her out first, or smothered her with a pillow. Then she'd get to work — she remembered where Jodie kept all her kink shit, she *knew* how to do this — she'd straddle her, and dig the knife in, and run it down, reach inside her, wrap her fingers around her guts and pull them out, her intestines and her stomach and such, on and on, like a magician pulling scarves.

In the process she'd get it all over her hands and face. So then she'd wash it off and head back downstairs and just pretend like nothing even happened.

She remembered the details of a draft in her 'Jodie' folder and how closely they hewed to the actual version of events inescapably laid out before her. Of course. It was the only possible explanation. All those years of fantasy finally manifested into some corporeal. "Oh, God." This was all her fault. Jodie was dead, and it was all because of what she'd done.

Cherry's phone was at 1% when she called her.

"Alice," She'd just finally gotten a signal; the storm must've fucked up some towers or something. "Where are you?"

"Cherry, it's 3 am. Have you even looked outside? Jesus Christ all the roads are underwater right now."

"Everything's underwater," Eva yawns.

"I'm not asking for a ride," Cherry says. "I just... I can't stay here. I don't wanna talk about it." She looks back at the door, thinking maybe she heard the knob turning. "I'm coming to ya. I don't care if I get a little wet."

"Seriously? That's like, 8 miles out, you c—"

The call cut out. Her phone died.

Laura found Natalie rocking back and forth in the lawn chair by the door just inside the garage. She shined her Maglite on her, curled over herself, her long hair falling over her face.

"Natalie? Are you okay?"

The hornets were getting worked up from the storm, buzzing bright black clouds in the moonlight by the open garage door. Water had started up the long concrete incline, leading out into what looked like an estuary. Rain had started to trickle back down again gently.

Laura notices the gun in her hand.

"*Jesus*, Natalie."

"You need to back away," Natalie says. "I'm not okay."

"What's going on? Just—"

"Don't you come any closer," Natalie points the gun at her.

"You're drunk," Laura's voice quivers. "Just... put the gun down before you hurt someone—"

"Tell that to the dead boy out back!"

"Just, put that down—"

"You know he had the deadname as me?" She laughs. "You think that's coincidence?"

"Wh— Who's dead?"

Natalie pulls the hammer back on the gun with a *click*. "None of this happens without me. Don't you *get it*?"

"Look, I— Wait," Laura closes her eyes. "Nobody here wants to hurt you."

Natalie stares blankly back at her for a couple of seconds. She puts the gun against her temple. "I can think of someone."

Laura lunges at her with the Maglite.

A gunshot woke up Aya with a shock.

# FOUR

She was laughing like crazy as the blood and brains ran down the power tools on the wall behind Laura's corpse. Her hands were shaking, knees scuffed and dirty from the tussle. It really didn't matter whether anything was real or fake now. There was nothing to do now but make amends with it all.

Natalie sticks the gun inside her mouth and pulls the trigger.

# THREE

Aya opens the door to the garage. All lit up crimson from the flashlight refracting off the tin ceiling and the bloody floodwaters. She makes out two familiar bodies slumped over in the accidental tide pool each with over half their heads missing. Angry hornets swarmed the carcasses stinging at their gaping wounds.

She can't help but wonder — is she dreaming?

No. She could smell it through the walls. All the rain and the blood and the gunpowder.

The shots were real.

She just doesn't want it to be real.

"Funny thing." The sudden voice behind her spun her around in shock. "I swear, you degenerates," She spits. Cum and blood ran down from between her legs. "Makes this *so* much easier for me, at least."

"Where are the others?" She was kinda sure she wasn't tripping anymore. Her eyes had adjusted, and even in the cobalt dark she could make out the blood on Sophie's hands.

"Lookie what I've found," she smiles, brandishing a gun.

Aya felt like she'd been here before somehow. Maybe in a past life. Instinct took over, and she rushed up the stairs; Sophie fired, blasting open the wall behind her. She doesn't look back all the way up. She turns into the bathroom and locks the deadbolt behind her.

Aya's barely catching her breath as Sophie's banging on the door.

All Aya could think was *What the fuck. I am going to die here. This is as far as I ever go. I am going to die now.* Maybe she is still tripping.

Sophie presses the gun to the door.

"Why?" Aya shouts. A bullet bursts through the door, exploding on the tile at her feet. She backs away from the shrapnel, ears ringing from the blow.

“Because you *faggots* make me want to fucking *vomit*,” she sneers. “Bunch of delusional thieves and rapists. Don’t think I haven’t noticed!”

“Fuck you!”

Aya stopped to think. There was the tub far against the wall. Johnny’s clothes slacked over the curtain. A mess of self-care bullshit on the cart across from the toilet — razors, tweezers, nail polish, makeup, brushes, hairspray, all sorts of shit.

“Like all the self-mutilation and the paedophilia is one thing, but *cultural appropriation*?” Sophie swallowed a mouthful of blood; she had never been so turned on before. “I’ve seen your posters! I know where you stole your name from!”

“For fuck’s sake I’m half-Japanese!” Aya took her torch lighter from her pocket. She clicked it on and looked around the bathroom, trying to make out anything she could use against her. “My dad was in the Navy!”

“Bullshit!” Another shot through the door

*Think, you idiot*, she smacked her head with her palm. Sweat ran down her brow. Hair was shagging in her eyes. *Think*. She looked at the torch lighter. She looked at the bottle of hairspray.

She grabs them and slips down into the bathtub.

Another gunshot blows through the deadbolt and the door comes flying open in a cloud of splinters.

Sophie takes a deep breath, then steps on slowly through the dark. She peers in with her phone light in one bloody hand and Natalie’s gun in the other.

The bathroom’s empty. Grimy tile, smells like girl and damp.

Of course. The curtain to the tub was pulled shut. She grips Natalie’s gun tighter until her knuckles turn bright white. She turns off her phone light, sticks it back in her pocket. She won’t need light where she’s going. She pulls the curtain open and takes aim at the eyes she finds flashing back at her in the dark.

It all happened in an instant. Fire, roaring *whoosh*, heat, blinding, all she can see, bright; she staggers back, shrieking, drops the gun, screaming from flaming fingers, “NO — ”

Excruciating. Eyes blinded, boiled out her skull. She hears her flesh crackle, smells something like burning pork. spins and she cannot see and she feels her way with stinging, immolated hands out through the splintered door and into the hallway.

The girl runs out and spirals over the railing, leaving a trail of bright fire embering behind her. She breaks her neck upon impact with the floor, and the carpet catches fire.

Soon enough, everything else does.

# TWO

Aya just laid there a while, catching her breath, never minding the stench emanating out the door — charred flesh, burning wood, rotting ancient smoke-stained wallpaper and glue on fire.

By the time she finally pulled herself out, smoke alarms blaring through the house now like tinnitus, everything was burning brightly; she had to squint to see anything. The fumes started going to her head.

She looked down the stairwell and the lower level looked less like home and more like an ocean of hellfire. It was searing hot, flames crackling, making her face itch and sweat like roasting marshmallows at summer camp.

She didn't want any of this to be real.

Maybe it didn't have to be.

She knew she was going to die here.

Maybe it was just the acid.

She didn't want to die here.

She wanted to believe.

So she just closed her eyes and made pretend as she descended the disintegrating flooded stairs into the blistering inferno.

# ONE

Moonlight guided her along the way. All the posts were out or toppled over. It came up to her knees at first. Then, as she reached the end of the driveway, it was up to her waist; just a mile down, towards the gas station, you were up to her shoulders.

Storm had started up again. Thunder flashes intermittently transforming the sunken bayside drive into a blue velvet painting of itself. Helicopters circling overhead, searchlights glaring down through the wooded wilderness. Her teeth chattered; pruned flesh turned pale.

Eventually she took her shoes off, stopped drifting and started swimming. She were never much of a swimmer but she settled into a paddle through the floodwaters, past floating masses of raw sewage, tracing the trail of the power lines in search of life. Perhaps a lighted building in the distance just beyond this haze. The girl surrendered herself to the current. Shifting waters swallowed and swept her away from this disaster.



MY BODY.  
THE HAND GRENADE

# MARILYN MANSON

pulled a double barreled sawed-off shotgun out from under the pulpit. He stuck the barrel into his mouth and leaned over onto his free arm. Deafening blast, flash of silver and white punctuated the song and the strobe lights exploded out the top half of his head through voluminous fireworks of blood, brain matter, greasy black hair, skull fragments, caked-on makeup, shredded waxen skin. His partially-beheaded body limped over and twitched on the altar, pulse-spraying spurts of black blood through gnawed arteries. You watched the fine, purple mist and chunks of wet meat wash over the crowd. It felt warm on your face.

Chaos erupts across the theater. A fragment of his cheekbone fell by your Chucks next to a third of his left eyeball, white contact lens still clinging to it's cornea. You wipe the blackened skin off the bone and hide it in your oversized Tripp pants.

You watched kids in Korn and Slipknot shirts fighting off his bandmates and security, piranha swarming the body, each of them trying to take home their own little piece of him. They clawed, ripped, tore with knives and fingers to get any kind of grip on him, pulling him apart at the seams, starting at the throat and working their way up and down through his torso from both ends. Red flowed down squalid white flesh. Whatever sinew held him together came undone and they popped him apart like a Barbie doll. They were scratching at each other over the pieces of him. You watched someone yank his toenail out with their teeth. You watched someone else run off with what's left of his jaw clenched in their fist. Some time passed and your brother grabbed you by the arm and pulled you towards the exits.

He drove you back home and told you if you ever told anyone he took you to that show he would kill you. He told you he knew where dad kept his gun and if you told mom or dad or anyone else knew were you were tonight he would stick the barrel in your mouth and shoot you. He would come into your bedroom at night when you were

sleeping and he would shoot you in the fucking face. He told you he was serious and asked if you understood and you nodded yea sure fine whatever. Then he put on his Around the Fur CD and drove you back home.

Mom and dad wouldn't be back until tomorrow. You followed him up into his bedroom. He asked if you wanted some drugs and he gave you some drugs. When you asked what they were he just said shut up they're drugs so you ate them like he told you to and he put on some fucked up Japanese movie about a guy with gashes on his cheeks that made him smile big when he took the rings out. The opening title rose up from a puddle of cum. You start to feeling real weird and funny around the scene where the guy cuts his own tongue in half.

You two played that game you never liked to play, the one you always said yes to because he was so much bigger than you and you knew nothing good would happen if you said no.

There's a sour taste in your mouth now. It lingers in your teeth for weeks. No matter how hard or how much you brushed you just couldn't seem to get it out. Not even if you flossed or used mouthwash. Your brother grinned all smug over breakfast as mom and dad argued about some dumb shit they read in the paper.

You didn't know he'd be dead in three weeks. Your dad found him in his bedroom when you were at school. He called the principal and had your aunt come pick you up early but you were in PE so it took some time to get to you.

They never told you know he died, but you knew. He used to show you how to do it too. He said it felt better than anything in this world. He showed you how to tie the belt just so it would stay put, how to loop it around your throat. How to really put your weight into it so you'd cut off the windpipe.

One time you tried it like he showed you, on your knees on the floor of your bedroom. You kind of liked it, but you got scared you'd choke so you swore you'd never do anything like that again.

You were 13 years old.

Your aunt came over every weekend to babysit while mom and dad went to play slots in Biloxi. She mostly just smoked cigarettes and watched *X-Files* reruns and let you do whatever. You played Kingdom Hearts II in your bedroom then went to the computer, caught up on Homestuck and Newgrounds and Penny Arcade and then you went to 4chan. You found a trap thread where everyone was egging on this sad little freak saying I'm gonna kill myself into killing herself. Pictures of hanging bodies and rotting suicides and LiveLeak wrecked gifs of people getting hit by trains and falling onto live wires. You replied with a picture of four cans of beer perched on the edge of a tub next to a toaster oven.

You kept all your files saved in a hidden folder in the StarCraft install files, where no one could find them.

You were listening to Mindless Self Indulgence getting hard to this hentai you found on a doujin scanlation site about a man who came into possession of a sarcophagus with the manifestation of an Egyptian goddess of death living inside of it. She made him her loyal servant, under the condition he does everything she says. The first thing she does him into a girl just to rape him with her futa cock. He wants to be obedient, though. She says if he goes along she'll give him the gift of eternal life, and he's just been diagnosed with cancer. So she turns him into a shota and rapes him again and then a futa loli an rapes him some more.

You kind of felt sick with yourself rubbing yourself through your jeans because you kind of wished that boy was you. You knew this was wrong, morally wrong, you knew rape was the worst thing anyone could do to anyone, worse than murder, because if you're dead you don't have to live with the trauma of dying, and if this wasn't just a story, if you were that guy you would've called the cops or the army or something, but this wasn't real, it was all just words and pictures on a screen, so it didn't really matter how wrong it was, you supposed. Said detachment was comforting though you also worried what it said about you that you jizzed in a sock to this every other night while your parents were

arguing. You knew it wasn't right in the slightest but it turned you on anyway.

You were halfway through the chapter where she accidentally age regressed him to the body of a child when your aunt knocked on the doorframe. You heard it through your earbuds and quickly minimized the browser. You knew she probably couldn't tell what you were doing from behind, at least, you prayed she couldn't see you touching your dick through your jeans. You don't think she did because she didn't really say anything or ask what you were doing, just told you the Chinese food was here. You waited until she was gone, wiped the browser history and went to the kitchen.

She asked if you wanted to try some wine and you said you weren't sure and she said well that's fine you know when she was your age her your dad used to sneak wine from her parents and play naughty with her. She said no one had to know and you said okay fine you guess you'll try and she poured you half a red Solo cup's worth just to start out. It tasted wasn't as sweet as communion wine but it still made you feel nice and warm inside. It reminded you of that thing they gave you at the dentist where yo always woke up wet and sticky down there.

She asked what you wanted to watch and you said you didn't know and she said well your father's got all those DVDs and you said you weren't allowed to watch those and she said she wouldn't tell. She wasn't a snitch or whatever the kids said in the rap videos. You said she was embarrassing and put on that Resident Evil movie with Milla Jovovich your dad said you weren't allowed to watch even though your friends were allowed to watch R-rated movies, and besides, you'd seen worse stuff in real life, and he'd say if you had a problem you could take it up with your mother, and you really didn't want to talk about it to your mother, because you knew she was going to tell no.

You really liked that movie. You thought it was a lot of fun. You really liked the girl who was a computer. You thought she was pretty cool. You thought a lot of the girls were pretty cool actually.

You passed out so your aunt tucked you in to bed and pecked you

on the cheek goodnight. Your room spun around warm wet and fading until you were swept up in a sea of stars.

Bright lights broke through your window, cutting through the static, and the gravity went out underneath you. Your vision stretched and blurred. You pulsed and faded through the walls and out the window into the black of night. You hovered there above your neighborhood and were drawn upward into a portal of light.

You felt fingers deep inside you. Warmth and calm. You didn't need to breathe in here. A draining stasis. Every part of you felt like it was pissing out your skin. Out from every orifice, out from every pore, out from every hole.

You didn't need eyes to see whatever these entities were, floating smooth mesh of black velvet and neon aluminum and thousands and thousands of eyes all staring through you, telepathic, forms beyond your physical comprehension. You felt when they reached into your head with one or many of their manifold tentacles and turned all the pieces around to try and make you complete again, but there was something wrong. Like a gear was stuck. They all seemed so sad and they told you you weren't ready yet. You weren't quite *you*. A soul started to come together around the center but had not yet taken proper form. It needed a vessel to take shape. You weren't sure what they meant.

They told you they would return when you were ready.

Everything vibrated out into a great nothing. A single empty hum. Your atoms stretched and spun off through the universe in an instant. They looped back around the edges at the infinite and came back in on each other in your bed.

You woke up in a fever sweat beneath wet sheets. A dog was barking outside.

A week later you're going to the movies with your aunt and uncle. Your dad just got his tax return and he said he's going to take everyone out to see Spider-Man 3. You know he really just wants to show off because they usually don't have money for this kind of thing. Your aunt kind of caught on to that too when you told her and that's why she

offered to pick everyone up in her new van.

You stopped for barbecue on the way and had to take a shit. Your dad was yelling at you because you were going to make everyone late to the movies. You felt bad for holding them up so you didn't tell him about all the blood in your stool.

As your aunt was pulling out to the intersection a red truck ran a red light and ran into her car.

Tires squealed, glass shattered, airbags deployed; whiplash bruised and twisted your neck. You heard something snap and realized it was your leg. You looked down and saw one of them facing the same way, carpet of the car floor crumpled up like a wad of tissue, bits of metal sticking through. You could see the asphalt through it. The car spun to a stop and your aunt got out and, for whatever reason, started to run.

As she crossed the intersection a hatch-back swerved out the way of an 18-wheeler and ran right into your aunt. It was honking and she turned to see it just in time for it to ram right into her. She burst like a water balloon and the rest of her body slipped under the bottom.

You were 15 years old.

Your dad tapped you on the shoulder and you jolted and yanked the earbuds out and you minimized the page. He asked you what you were listening so loud and if you wanted to go deaf. He asked what you were listening to. You lied it was just some video game music because you couldn't tell him where you got a CD that said 'Goreshit' on it or explain why his love felt all wrong.

He told you it was time for dinner and you better hurry up. He sneered and told you you better not be looking at porn again. You weren't though. You hated how he always assumed the worst.

You were replying to a question on a 4chan thread about the Marilyn Manson suicide show. You had a photo on your laptop of the bone you kept in the crucifix box you got from your grandpa from confirmation. You had scrubbed it clean and prayed to it every night before you went to bed. You prayed to Satan he would kill mom and dad and finally leave you alone with all of their shit because you knew they were bad people and you hated them because you didn't care anymore, just like how they never really cared about you, all they cared about having a kid so they wouldn't be fuck ups like your fairy faggot uncle. You modeled all your spells after song lyrics because you didn't think you could write anything original yourself. You were learning about a lot of cool weird music from 4chan. You were downloading a lot of interesting weird stuff off Soulseek and burning it into a pile of random CD-Rs you stole from your dad.

Everyone in the thread told you your story was bullshit.

You told mom and dad some of what you were feeling and they made you start going to youth group. You talked to the pastor there every other week what was going on but it didn't seem like there was nothing for you. He said it sounded like it was your spirit needed some work. Like your heart wasn't in the right place. You needed absolution. You needed prayer, he said. Lots of prayer.

You stopped talking to him after that and spent hours on your knees in the chapel every week. You talked to Satan instead of God because you knew that's what would piss Him off the most.

No one would have believe the voices you heard even if you told them. No one would have believed what they told you to do. You would sneak away from youth group and cum in confessionals and in bathrooms and the sacristy and you would go around in the dark and smear the cum on the walls with your hand so it wouldn't look like cum but instead where someone sweaty leaned against the marble. You would slit your hand and smeared tiny crimson pentagrams in the darkened corners where you knew they wouldn't find them in a while.

You'd stare at mom and dad from the backseat with knives for eyes listening to Kid A and Loveless and In the Aeroplane Over the Sea. You just wanted them dead and gone. You didn't care how.

You used to go over to your best friend's and watch Monty Python movies and The IT Crowd and Doctor Who on weekends when your dads went out to play cards. He had his own computer in his bedroom, a laptop his grandpa bought him. He owned a bunch of VHS anime tapes his parents bought when he was younger before his dad was shot while stationed in the middle east. Yu Yu Hakusho and Ranma ½ and Dirty Pair and Dragon Ball Z. You made a dead baby joke and he laughed and asked you if you'd ever seen Bible Black.

This was how you and the other boys used to bond. You'd show each other the most fucked up shit you could find just to gross each other out. But everyone thought you were a freak because you never gagged or hurled no matter how awful it was. Guy with his face flopped open like a taco, guy pulling out his intestines like a clown pulling scarves out of their sleeve. Bestiality, child death, self-mutilation, you didn't flinch, you didn't blink. No matter how much glass or ripping flesh or blood or sex or death you didn't flinch one bit. You never minded all the gore. You knew meat was meat and whatever you saw had already happened and it wasn't actively happening so there wasn't anything to feel about it. It was all just lights and colors prearranged. Same order every time. It was all in the past tense. If anything you found it comforting.

Your best friend liked you for that. He liked the way you looked at

things open to the plurality of experience. He took you out to see the latest Jackass movie and even bought you Taco Bell on the drive home. You two used to stay up late watching Adult Swim ripping bongos and huffing glue and whippits until your heads would hurt. He let you borrow all his old Final Fantasy games because you had only played Kingdom Hearts before. You liked them all but VII was your favorite even if the graphics kind of sucked compared to VIII and IX.

The scene where you dressed up like a girl to save Aeris made you feel funny in a way you hadn't since you started reading hentai.

You were talking about it and your best friend had the idea of doing you up in drag, as a joke. He thought to dress you like the Wicked Witch of the West. He helped you steal his sisters dress and stockings and boots and you caked on thick green makeup and put putty on your nose and chin to distort your shape and you wore a long orange wig you took out her closet. You looked more like a lump of Play-Doh than a girl. You wore his sister's bra and stuffed it with her panties to make fake tits. He took his mom's kitchen knife and his dad's jumpsuit and turned an Emperor Palpatine mask inside-out and painted it white to make himself look like Michael Myers. You two went around taking candy from children at knifepoint until someone called the cops.

He asked if you wanted to go to a house party his sister's boyfriend was throwing and you said sure and tagged along. She was dressed up like Harley Quinn from Arkham Asylum. She recognized her clothes on you immediately and laughed and gave you crap about them. She got drunk and asked if you wanted to touch her tits. They feel nice, don't they. She offered you some spiked punch and Frito pie. There were a bunch of other kids there, most of them dressed up like Heath Ledger's Joker or Rorschach or slutty whatever.

You drank until everything was a blur haze of color and noise. Lot of 808s. Lot of broken glass and screaming. You watched someone shit faced drunk carry someone even more drunk to their car. Their limbs flopped as he held her like puppets caught in each other's strings.

You played spin the bottle and ended up having to kiss her on the

lips. Everyone said ooh and laughed at the stupid ugly lumpy freak making out with Harley Quinn. She tasted like antiseptic and fruit and pulled you in and you felt warm and wet slither in on your tongue down your throat. When she pulled away you'd stained half her face baby shit green.

Her friend laughed and put her arm around you and poured you a really strong drink. Said you're the man now, dog. Said to keep that in mind when you're older. A woman likes a man who takes what he wants like that. Shows them you're strong and brave.

They fished her body out the lake near her house the next week. Before your mom changed the channel you saw them show how she had handcuffed ankles to her boyfriend's free weights and how she had tied his TV to her throat with the power cord.

You were 17 years old.

You started art school and didn't do much besides listen to vaporwave and get drunk and fall behind on classes. You couldn't seem to concentrate on anything. You couldn't meet a deadline. Nothing you ever made ever came out right.

You spent a lot of time writing fan theories on a Serial Experiments Lain forum and playing BlazBlue and Marvel vs. Capcom and Mortal Kombat with the friends you made in art class because of your glow-in-the-dark Invader Zim shirt. Your username was arsenicCatnip1994 and everyone called you a faggot for liking Homestuck, or as they liked to call it, "Homosuck."

You were known for your elaborate anime fan theories, how most art was actually God trying to communicate with us in language we can understand since the tongues of angels fail the comprehension of human ears. You wrote a long post explaining how the Wired was actually a simulation within a simulation, that what appeared to be reality in the show was actually still part of the Wire and Cyberia was the key to unlocking this, suggesting you, the viewer, and Lain were, in fact, one and the same person. You had lots of stills and quotes to back up your point and knew a lot about philosophy and religion. People on the internet called you retarded and told you to lay off on the meth.

You started cutting and wore hoodies all the time to cover up the scars so mom and dad wouldn't see when they came to visit.

You met one of the college boys from the Lain board in real life one day after finding out you didn't live very far from each other. He picked you up from your house and he gave you the same kind of drugs your brother used to give you. You couldn't help but laugh and he looked confused. He didn't know it was the same kind of drugs and you didn't want to explain.

You ended up over at his place smoking pot with the freaks and weirdos. They gave you a lot of shit about how naive you were and you got along because you agreed and could laugh even though you were still too scared to be gay around them and they showed you Funeral Parade of Roses and House and Tokyo Gore Police and Tetsuo: The Iron Man

and Love Exposure.

You'd never seen a tranny in real life before. You didn't want to think about her or look at her for too long. You could feel your insides squirming as the notion got you harder.

You stepped outside to have a cigarette. Another one of them approached you. You held your breath like you were afraid you'd catch her sick before you realized it might be rude and regardless what she was she was still people just like you. You remembered something your dad used to say about judging the sin but not the sinner. She asked your name and you told her yours and she told you hers. You told her that's a very sweet name and she laughed and smiled and said of course it is I picked it out myself. She had a very pretty smile but you didn't want to think too long about it because you were afraid you'd want to turn yourself into one of them if you ever got the idea in your head you could ever smile or dress or look anywhere near just as pretty as her.

She asked if you were feeling nervous and you said you just never been around so many girls before in one place. You said you weren't expecting there to be so many of them here and most of the parties you went to were total sausage fests.

She asked you if you wanted your tarot read. You said you were scared and she said it wasn't like that. She said tarot wasn't inherently hurtful, you could really take the readings however you wanted, so if you didn't want them to hurt they didn't have to. She said it was up to you though.

She was sweet in a way you thought was only real in movies. People never talked to you like that. Being known meant opening yourself up to get hurt. You knew that this would hurt because it always hurt. But you didn't want to be alone any more. If this was forever it might as well hurt.

She sat you down on her bed and you looked around at her posters and you had some in common, not just the same bands but the same exact designs as well. She sat down across from you and crossed her legs and asked you to think about where you were in life. Then she drew for

you the ten of swords, death reversed, and the devil. You don't remember what she said that meant exactly.

A couple hours later she gave you a ride home and a peck on the cheek goodnight and smiled. She said you were a good kid, and it'd be cool to be friends or whatever. She said it'd be nice to see you again sometime.

You just figured she was being friendly. You never texted her or anything.

Two weeks later she leapt headfirst from the top of a building downtown. You watched her fall as you were walking back to your car after losing a Magic: The Gathering draft. The splat was exactly the same sound your aunt made when she got hit by that 18-wheeler. Her head like the rest of her body wasn't intact anymore but her eyes were still staring right at you.

You were 19 years old.

You were drinking three bottles of Svedka a week and living off macaroni and cheese and ramen and Amp energy drinks you stole from the dollar store. You stopped going to class and you were crashing from couch to couch with your constant headache and fucked up guts and two bags holding everything you owned.

You played a lot of Final Fantasy XI on your laptop on the couches you would crash, more than you used to. You never told anyone but had a girlfriend there, if you could call it that. You were dating a Mithra Black Mage with the username xXx\_h3ath3r\_mas0n\_xXx. It wasn't anything serious, just something you did for fun.

It was nice to play pretend.

Mom and dad invited you over to spend Christmas with them. They asked you how school was going and you lied and told them stories like you'd really been there but they were all just lies you stole from the people who's couches you crashed.

That night as you were drifting to sleep in your old bedroom you felt a presence at the door. The room expanded again and you felt your body pulled out and upward back into the cold starry black of night.

You felt fingers deep inside of you again. The forms floated there but there was something different about them. You couldn't see their eyes. You felt distant from them in a way you'd never be.

They found the hope in you. They worked their tendrils around it and yanked it out through your mouth. You watched them consume it in front of you until there was nothing left. You felt hollow on the inside. Finally freed from the burden of wanting to live.

Your dad found you floating in the bathtub with the showerhead still on. The water had overflowed and ran red out onto the carpet outside the door.

You got 22 stitches in both your arms and spent a week in a mental institution. You got on medication and learned about mindfulness but mostly just slept and did a bunch of coloring pages and breathing exercises.

You would get prescribed medication that made you less sad. The

medication would work, more or less, until you would start getting sad again. Then they would up the dosage until you weren't sad any more. But you always got sad eventually. When they maxed you out on a dosage they would add another medication or change medications or drop the dosage of the other one or take you off and start all over.

Mom and dad helped you get a job at Old Navy doing overnight stocking. You mostly just listened to music and put stuff on racks and changed signage. It was nice. You didn't really even have to think very much.

One day one of the girls asked if you were doing anything after work. She asked if you wanted to grab some breakfast and get high and maybe watch some anime and you said sure whatever.

She talked about her family and her dog who died and her brother and how bullshit the job was and she packed the bong. You mostly didn't say anything. You mostly kept quiet in the corner on the couch. She put on Adult Swim and you watched that episode of Family Guy where Brian fucks a tranny and pukes everywhere for like half a minute straight.

She asked if you wanted to cuddle and you said yes. Your heart raced and she asked if you were a virgin and you said you didn't know what that had to do with anything and she said ah so you are a virgin and you laughed and said not really but it was complicated. You said you had had sex before but it never went very well for you so you mostly just didn't fuck.

She asked if you were a faggot and you said no and she laughed and took another bong rip and told you if you weren't a faggot then you should come eat her pussy out. She said it like a pornstar and you got all wet and hard. Your heart beat like it would have burst out your chest without bone in the way. You nervously got on your knees and she unzipped her pants and pulled them with her striped blue cotton panties to her ankles. She spread her legs wide open, drawing you by the hair to her blooming cunt.

Her pussy tasted like sugar-free Monster and steel. She was gushing

wet and warm all over your goatee and your peach fuzz mustache. You tried to come up for air but she gripped your hair tighter and shoved you back in. She was really loud and said a lot of dirty fucked up stuff and when she came she held you in there so tight you couldn't breath until your head went fuzzy. You remembered clawing at her thighs as they squeezed around your neck like twin boas, watched your vision fill with stars and followed a portal through your tongue peeking out into realms below. A world of crushed gunmetal black velvet and eyes.

You felt like you were going to drown. Something warm flowed down your front.

She told you she was sorry, she didn't know she was on her period. You insisted it was fine and she offered you a shower and you said it was fine and you just wiped the blood off with wet paper towels and zipped your hoodie over the shirt. She said she was sorry, she said don't make this weird, she asked if you wanted to smoke some weed and talk about it and you left without really saying much. She asked if you two were cool the next day at work and you said whatever.

She fell commuting home from a blizzard on Valentine's Day and got covered up by snow and slush when they plowed the roads and died of cold beneath the ice. They didn't find the body until the snow melted enough for someone to notice her head poking out. That was the same day they found your mother hanging from the ceiling fan in her bedroom. She had been hanging there for seven days while dad was away on a business trip. Their neighbors had called the police to complain about the smell.

You were 21 years old.

You went to the bathroom and took a shit. As you washed your hands in the sink you noticed a strip of skin above your lip had come undone, like a pull-tab. You pulled at it, and it caught, so you pulled a little harder and heard it rip and felt it pull away at the meat underneath. You pulled again, wet blood slick over your hands, and it ran up your jaw, over your orbital, around your eye. It stung and wept and ached but the fresh air felt nice on the raw meat, and though your hands were shaking you felt compelled to pull, until you felt it come around your skull, down your back, until you unraveled yourself into a pile of tender bloody crimson and steaming tendons and bone.

You woke up in a fever sweat beneath wet sheets. A dog was barking outside.

The cheekbone was still in that box. You chucked it over the bridge into the river. You didn't want it any more.

You couldn't seem to escape it though. You got an email from Vice because someone saw your post on that message board from a couple of years ago. They wanted to interview you about the Marilyn Manson suicide show and offered to give you some money for the trouble so you said sure fine whatever because you wanted to build a new PC.

You let them in to your apartment and sat them down on the couch. Dad was busy helping out at the church where he spent most of his time those days. They set up cameras and microphones and they picked a spot to frame you against your most aesthetically appealing wall scrolls. They asked if you could point yourself out in the crowd and you did. You saw yourself there wearing oversized Tripp pants and worn-out Chucks. Your brother was still alive and standing there behind you in an ICP hockey jersey and a backwards baseball cap smoking a joint.

It didn't look nothing like you remembered. The lighting was all wrong. You remembered how you read how slippery memory is, how you can never really trust what you remembered unless you can confirm with someone else. There were very few people in your life you shared a past with any more.

They asked you why you thought he did it and you said you weren't sure but you had a theory. It sounded crazy but you had one. They said go ahead so you told them how going through all of Marilyn Manson's music, his weird fixations on women and metamorphosis and cocoons and rebirths, there's this theme of transformation. Like Silence of the Lambs or something. That if he could hurt himself enough he would become someone else. He could somehow flay himself and fashion a new skin to wear that fit him right. Perhaps if reincarnation were real maybe he could come back in a gentler form washed clean from the sins of his past life. Maybe then he would finally be complete.

Your dad texted you to say he would be late coming home, so you stayed up late and played Dark Souls. You didn't notice the call you got around midnight. You had put your phone on silent.

A couple found his body washed up among the rocks. A note was found under a rock but the rain had washed the ink out of the paper.

You were 23 years old.

You had a lot of time on your hands and nothing better to do.

You upgraded the CPU and graphics card and pirated FL Studio and bought some AKGs and a Chord Mojo. You subscribed to a VPN and pirated VSTs and watched tutorials and learned how to slice and chop breaks and use side-chaining and compressors and you started making breakcore and you set up a Soundcloud and a Bandcamp and you bought and mapped a MIDI controller.

You found your dad's drugs one day. You never knew he did all this shit. You never knew he dropped acid or did DMT or 2-FDCK or nitrates or changa or weed or molly or meth or crack. His selection reminded you of something out of a Hunter S. Thompson book. You didn't know he had Adderall or Xanax or Cialis or dozens of other prescriptions hidden away but you found it all in his drawers with a bunch of other stuff you never expected.

You figured if you had to die maybe overdosing wouldn't be so bad. But no matter how hard you tried you didn't die. You never died. You just transcended and broke your brain into a million little pieces scattered around you in mirrorshard fragments refracting the clandestine secret light faltering core of your soul.

You were careful from then on. You knew certain combinations of medications and psychedelics could potentially kill you so you avoided those, or at least purged them from your system first. You felt like maybe if therapy couldn't solve nothing maybe this would at the very least help you to feel again.

You were happening all at once everywhere all of the time forever. Months become days become seconds become hours. Framework ceased to be relevant. You knew you were in a linear sense; for the most part. But the order of events as they happened felt random. You wondered if this was simply because you were becoming more aware of them.

Everything flew by in a breathing blur of pink and turquoise glow. You mostly lived on protein shakes and baby food pouches. You were finally getting into Final Fantasy XIV now that expansions were coming out. You were happy to hear Nobuo Uematsu was doing the OST again.

You were really getting your shit together.

You were making some very smart purchases.

You spent a lot of time getting high and watched all the Monster High movies on Netflix and all of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic and Azumanga Daioh and Lucky Star Nichijou. You watched through Evangelion for the first time, but didn't start the Rebuild movies because you wanted to wait for all four to come out first.

You wanted to capture that feeling when you were young again, when you used to could just feel safe all alone in your room, without having to worry about anything hurt you. When everything was soft. When everything was warm and safe. The music you were making reflected that. It sounded like Tekken 3, Jet Set Radio Future, Wipeout XL, Phantasy Star Online, Ridge Racer Type 4, Silent Hill 2.

You were jacking off again. You thought it would be hard to find anything that could make you hard after putting it off for so long but you got lucky off Reddit. You found this one hentai about a high school girl who's drugged and raped and realized she kind of liked it. She got fucked by all her friends, her teachers, and even her dad. She drops out of school because she likes it so much and becomes a homeless heroin addict whore before her former classmates all gang rape and impregnate her and she overdoses.

You hated yourself even more every time you came to it. No matter how long you spent in the shower you could never wash the shame off. It clung to your skin and followed you around all day like sweat and perfume. You couldn't stop yourself wishing that girl was you.

You felt sick to your stomach. You were picking at a scab. You didn't want to know what you'd find waiting for you underneath. After watching a girl take her own life mid-orgasm on a live stream you found on /b/ you vowed to never look at porn ever again.

You found her once more in Final Fantasy XIV. She was farming mobs in Azys Lla. She kept the same username after all this time. xXx\_h3ath3r\_mas0n\_xXx. You messaged her hi in the chat. She replied hello and long time no see. You replied with a smiley face. She was

playing an Elezen Dragoon this time. You mained a Black Mage.

One day asked you where you lived because she was always curious and you told her. She said no shit me too, where at.

Your boss put a hand on your shoulder and told you you couldn't wear headphones doing inventory anymore until efficiency improved. He overdosed on fentanyl a month after that and was replaced three days later. The new boss said he felt very sad to have lost someone so close to the company but that we must all hold out hope for a bright future in these unprecedented times, especially with the holiday season fast approaching. He said stocking and signage could wear headphones again so long as they were open-ear and kept at a reasonable volume with no explicit language.

You were 25 years old.

You were talking to her on Discord. She asked if you wanted to hang out sometime so she invited you over a week before your birthday.

You told her she had a pretty voice and she said thank you and she worked very hard on it. You asked if she was you know trans or whatever and she said ha ha whatever gave that away. You tried to imagine what that must be like to try and change the way others hear you. You wondered if it was a skill that could be learned and if so what else there was you hadn't considered yet.

She said she really wanted to meet you. She said she's always wondered what you looked like based on what you sounded like and you said you never really took any pictures because you never really liked the way you looked. She said that seemed silly, there must be some reason why you act so shy, it's okay to be shy. You freaked out and had an episode and cooled off and and she said she just wanted to get to know you a little better is all.

You told her about all the deaths. How everything you touched died. She said she didn't really care. She said you seemed really sweet and she really liked you and didn't give a shit if you were cursed or haunted or whatever. She said she thought you had a really sexy voice and she'd get turned on trying to imagine what you looked like in real life.

She asked you whatever happened to that music you were making. You told her a couple months ago you were doing a collab with Sewerslvt, you were really excited for that, but you hadn't told her how those plans had fallen through. You didn't tell her you deleted all of your social media accounts and blocked your contacts who saw the video you were featured in and had no choice but to cut ties and you got fired because someone told the GM and she was the only person you even talked to anymore.

You said you could meet up but you shouldn't fuck, just to be safe about it. You said you wanted to no pressure but you knew you really shouldn't. You said you didn't want to hurt her. She agreed and she wasn't going to do anything sexual but you think she was maybe lying. You were too afraid to ask for clarification.

You decided to meet her at her apartment which was less than half an hour away. You ate a couple edibles before heading over. She came down the stairs and let you in and smiled and walked you up.

You thought you recognized her face from somewhere before. But she didn't seem to recognize yours.

Her bedroom looked a lot like yours except with a pink and blue and white flag in the corner where a Madoka Magica wall scroll hung in yours. She asked if you wanted to smoke some weed and you said sure. She put on something she told you was called Drain Gang and grinded up a huge nug and packed her bong and torched half the bowl.

You asked her if she knew anyone with the same name of your best friend all those years ago but then you recognized the name on the pill bottles on her desk and you went red all over. You started to apologize profusely.

She just kind of laughed. She said it was a small world. Especially cities like this. She said most people have something like six degrees of separation from anyone else but transsexuals typically only have two.

She said she was kind of shocked you didn't turn out the same as her. She said she always got that vibe from you even as a kid. You said you just never really considered it a possibility for yourself.

You told her actually you had considered it before. But you felt like it was only a kink for you. Like a sex thing. It seemed selfish and wrong and you didn't judge her but you were different somehow.

She said that was stupid. If you want to be a girl, just be a girl.

You said it didn't matter. You said it went deeper than that.

You said you believed everyone was here for a reason, part of god's plan or whatever, and you believed the reason you were here was pain and sorrow. You couldn't find any other explanation for everything you'd been through. You said you'd always overlooked the agony of isolation because the alternative was blood on your hands. If not directly, then at very least by proximity. This path was better than the others because no one got hurt this way. That's why you didn't want to fuck anymore or look at porn or make music. You said you wished you

could make yourself a virgin again, like you could just sew up the hole and let it scar over and heal.

She said that's cool for you but she didn't really didn't give a shit if anyone got hurt, one way or another. Vulnerability is trust. Of course anyone could hurt you. She said as far as she's concerned all sex has an element of harm to it since all human interactions are transactional. But the important part is knowing there is no such thing as equivalent exchange. So long as you both get something from each other.

She said maybe they'd be good for you too, since you felt so frozen and locked up for so long, and she had know you for so very, very long. She said sometimes you act like that because you need it but don't know how to get it so you hurt yourself just to get what you need because you don't think you can get it from someone else in a way that doesn't slowly kill you. Sometimes it just feels better that way but it doesn't give you the kind of control you think it does.

She said she'd always had a crush on you but she didn't know what to do with it because she didn't really realize the feeling was sexual until she started taking hormones.

She asked if you ever listened to Hum and you said no so she put it on and told you to hit the bong. She told you how Deftones ripped off their whole sound and you could hear it, but this was different. They were still heavy, but soft somehow. Like if Deftones were like horny boys in sex shops this was like horny boys in coffee shops. Around the third song you started crying though you couldn't put a finger on why. There was just something so sad about missing the train.

She held you so close. You didn't even need to ask. You felt so very small. She looked at you and asked what was wrong and you cried harder and she held you and pulled you in close. You felt your boner pressing through your leg on her stomach. You felt weird about having a boner but she didn't stop holding you until you stopped shaking and pulled yourself together enough to hit the bong again.

You watched the same old anime VHS tapes you used to when you were kids. Yu Yu Hakusho and Ranma ½ and Dirty Pair and Dragon

Ball Z. She asked if you wanted to cuddle and you said okay.

You asked her how she got so soft.

Your heart raced but she nuzzled your neck and you melt against her.

She asked if you wanted to make out and you said okay.

Her mouth like an ocean on your tongue. She tasted nothing better than you imagined, bitter and sweet all at the same time. Soft lips caress you down.

She guided your hand to her crotch.

She was wet, wetter than you imagined.

You were expecting something else down there. Not a hole.

She wrapped her legs around your fingers and you felt her from the inside as she undid your pants and shoved you back on her bed and sucked on your dick until she drooled and gagged all over you.

She said wow you're bigger than she ever had imagined.

She excused herself and went to her dresser and came back with lube and a tiny little brown bottle labeled Double Scorpio. She fingered her cunt and rubbed lube on your cock as your eyes rolled back and you stared at the ceiling. It was vibrating slightly, seeming to fray along a seam. Like it could open up into nowhere.

She opened the bottle and huffed from it and her eyes numb and her body went gentle and she moaned. You felt her weight against your crotch, felt sweet lips caressing the shaft of your penis, felt it slide into her tight, surgically sculpted pussy.

You were surprised how much it felt like the real thing.

You started to wonder if it ever really mattered what was real or not in the first place. It all started to feel very arbitrary, now that you knew it could feel like *this*. She felt like heaven from the inside. Every inch of you enveloped in holy light.

You started to cry and she slowed and asked if you were okay. You said you were fine. You were sorry for getting so emotional. You said you were just thinking too hard. She asked if you wanted some of what she was huffing. She said it would help make you nice and stupid and you

said sure. You took a few big sips of it through your nose. It smelled real funny.

Something felt wrong. Your heart beat out of time. Your ears rang and everything tinted crimson like a Silent Hill game over screen.

You heard a sound like something broke inside your skull.

You needed this.

Your lips met each other and you sucked her into you, closed yourself around her, pulled yourself deeper inside of her, fingers running through her scalp; she guided them to her neck and you asked for more of whatever was in that bottle.

Another huff and the world deflates and spirals out away from you. Skin awash in wildfire. Heat slick and sweat.

You coiled around each other like two snakes fucking and shoved your tongue down your throat as your ears rang and your eyes went red and she begged you to choke her so you squeezed tighter and she said more and you thrust as blood rushed and your temple throbbed. Everything went amethyst and wet bokeh and you melted deeper into her as you felt sweat form at your brow and you felt tension building up inside as if you were filling up about to burst.

She tightened her grip on your arm as you tightened your grip on her throat and you came.

Everything vibrated out into a great nothing. A single empty hum. Your atoms stretched and spun off through the universe in an instant. They looped back around the edges at the infinite and came back in on each other in her bed.

You could see it all so clearly now.

You realized the instruments they were using to rearrange your insides weren't actually rearranging anything, you were just misinterpreting the sensations, their communication had in all these years failed to align, a failure of translation, and nothing was being conveyed aside from whatever self-reflection their machines picked up at the time. There really wasn't any reason behind it all. You were merely a control subject in case study.

They all seemed disappointed. They were expecting more.

They sent you back and your vision faded from white to black and red again.

You came to with your hands still clenched around her neck. Cum still pulsing out her hole. Her face was purple and red from the neck up. You loosened of your grip, but she didn't start breathing again. She wasn't breathing. She wasn't breathing.

You panicked.

She was still warm, though.

The air still tasted metallic.

You reached for your phone on the bedside table and called 911. You leapt on top of her and started performing CPR on her limp body. The operator asked what your emergency was and you tried to remember her address but the words turned up empty in your mouth.

You started to cry again. The operator said something but you couldn't make out the words anymore.

You felt yourself unravel at the ends. Your head turned to a mush of static. The features of her room felt flat and started fading along with your vision. A steady dull hammering in the back of your head. You felt something wet on your upper lip and noticed your nose was bleeding. Red drops fell on her pale flesh.

You never stopped trying to bring her back.

Pink fades to blue. Sirens outside, paramedics at the door.

You keep it pumping straight to her heart.

You were 27 years old.

# FINAL FANTASY FANTASY





. . . All the rivers run into the sea; yet  
the sea is not full;

*-Ecclesiastes*

*I beheld  
brightness; and  
kissed this*

*God above me.*  
—Job, XXXIII, 27-8

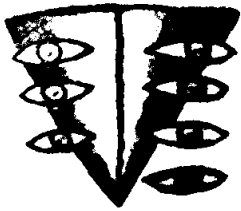
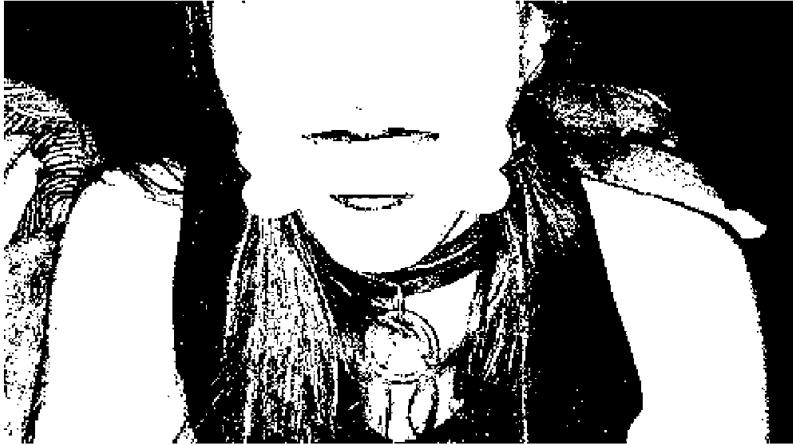
beautiful,  
wanton,                      *bizarre,*                      ter-  
rible, and                      a little  
disgust.

by Edgar Anal Pee

I

## IS THIS REAL ?

I WANT U TO LOVE MYSELF BUT IM NOT QUITE HER  
RIGHT NOW . . . OH WELL . . . !!! TRY AGAIN , BITCH !!!  
WITNESS NOW AS FALSE SPLINTEREGO BECOME  
SHATTERED ANGELSPIT WHILST SHADES GNAWED  
CRIMSON SLASH DEEP & UP THE MIDDLE VOMITS  
FORTH INFERNAL HEAT SUCKING DOWN AIR LIKE A  
FISH OUT OF WATER . TELL ME NOW ( IF YOU CAN )  
HOW DOES IT FEEL ? ALWAYS COMFORTABLY NUMB ?  
WRAPPED IN PLASTIC PRESS & GAG EVERY SLICK  
ORIFICE SHUT ! UP ! STOP SQUIRMING U CUNT HA HA HA  
REALLY THOUGHT U COULD GET AWAY FROM THIS  
SHIT . DUMBASS . SILVERFUCK CATCHES COLLARBONE &  
GNASHES SLITS / SLIPS STOMACH GUTTED RIGHT . HERE .  
SEVERED RESPIRATORY & SUFFOCATED RE : UR OWN  
INSIDES OUT . WANT U TO RUB THOSE KNEES RAW  
LIKE UR PRAYING FOR IT . I CAN SHOW U PROFANE  
MAYBE LET U IN ON A LITTLE SECRET . IVE LEARNED SO MUCH  
MORE FROM BAD PORNOGRAPHY THAN ANY GOD OR  
RELIGION . OH , & BY THE WAY . . . U ONLY GOT NINE  
LIVES LEFT SO U REALLY OUGHT TO START



197



## II / IV

### GO FUCK YOURSELF

NATALIE let me in when no one else would. We met in the mosh pit of a basement show & she gave me a bunch of bruises & bites & a bunch more when we got back to her apartment, which were especially nice to have around. I would touch the bruises & watch them turn bright white yellow blue pink & purple all over again. Made me feel like something real had really happened.

That first night she started crying because she couldn't cum although I told her there was no pressure but she was worried I'd be disappointed so I told her that's okay, a lot of people can't cum on antidepressants & she said she hasn't taken anything in over a year, which I guess in hindsight explains a lot about everything except for all the empty pill bottles on her nightstand.

The night after that she asked me to pee in her mouth & I did & she started crying again & I asked if she was okay & she said yea, just overwhelmed & I said, that makes sense, getting peed in the mouth is kind of an overwhelming experience, but she wouldn't make eye contact or talk to me after that, at least, not for a while. She went for a walk around the park & left me to tend her cats; her garden withered as the flames leaking out from her feet in the freshly fallen snow, trailing steam & ice in her wake.

It was nice to have the whole bed to myself. The moment she fell asleep she dissolved into fog like Alucard in *Symphony of the Night*. She said she couldn't fall asleep with another touching her, including herself. So it all worked out okay, I guess, I had lots of room, but I could tell she was sad, even when she wasn't there, & I was sad too, because even with all the plushies it still got pretty lonely.

I think she tried to make up for her absence by initiating a whole bunch of crazy sex, but I'm not sure if she was just trying to keep me from breaking up with her. One time she came & rushed straight to the

shower & turned the water cold as it would go, worried her smolder might burst her into flames, really fuck the whole place up; I said, there's no sense in that, everything here is made of glass, it won't catch fire; but she just wouldn't listen, kept on going like, maybe *your* world is made of glass, but *mine* is kerosene.

She freaked out so bad this one time I had to bust down the door just to get to her. She carved her arms up pretty much all over, but forgetting the nature of this place, just made it harder for her to pick herself back up off the floor. I took my shirt off, sopped the blood up & wrung it into her mouth & found the needle & the thread in her vanity & sewed her up & set all her insides right again.

I suggested ordering a pizza & she gave me her card & she rolled us a joint & we did whippits & 3-Methoxyphencyclidine & she tried to show me some Jodorowsky movie about archetypes & alchemy but I couldn't stomach all the animal death or the feces. Then she said there was like a fan-made remake culled from found VHS tapes about dogs & it was only an hour long & I said that sounds so much better than this dumb crap, only we were way too fucked up to figure out how to pirate that movie, so we wound up watching *Daisies* instead, which was saved to her hard drive already.

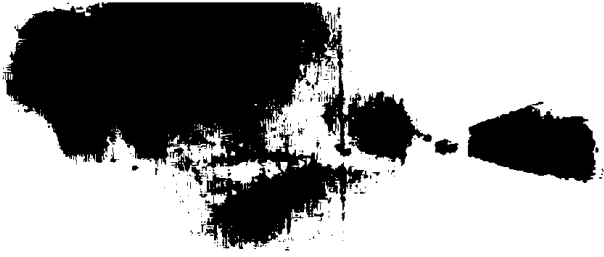
Eventually all we ever really did was just fuck & get high & watch movies. She didn't care about nothing except maybe occult goth shit. She started selling off all her games & records & anime DVDs & everything else so she could buy more drugs & junk from the metaphysical supply store, claiming she was letting go of material attachments, her desires, she was on the precipice of enlightenment, or *something?* & coming home always more crystals, candles, tarot decks; everything she wouldn't share with me & none of which she really understood outside their presumed significance. She kept saying magic was a solitary practice. I knew that was bullshit, but I kept my mouth shut nonetheless. Love is sometimes saying *No*.

I'd come back from foraging to find her mid-conversation with the vanity, again. Lately she was having most of her conversations by with herself. *I just don't feel like anyone else would understand me.*

That night I was fisting her for a change, milking prostate, trying to keep the temperature down. There was a blizzard outside so we opened the windows so snow set over everything. Cold comfort for her. Those days it seemed a stiff breeze could set her off.

Her face flushed, light leaking through the fissures in her pallid flesh. Ecstatic whimper & gasp. For a moment it was beautiful. I could feel her heartbeat through her anus. I could tell she was about to come. She pulled me in deeper, up to the elbow, sucking me in. I grabbed her thigh for support & she grasped the hairs on my neck like a kitten. *Don't... please... stay...*

Whatever sweetness in her voice now was brand new. I wanted so badly to kiss her right then & there but I couldn't; she had me at an awkward angle. Her insides had taken me up to the shoulder. It was like her ass was trying to devour me whole. I licked her taint & she came at the first stroke of my tongue, spewing thick magmatic loads all down my neck & back. Stung like hell but I was too deep to pull out now, besides it burned hot enough after a moment I couldn't feel it anyways. Her ass gnawed me to the rhythm of her cock's pulsations, pulling me deeper & deeper with every spurt. The undertow was much too strong to fight back. I surrendered to its suction, held my breath, closed my eyes & at last I was swallowed up deep where she would never let me go.



### III / VI

## BLOOD & GUTS IN MONSTER HIGH

There's a hole in the sky where the moon used to be. The same exact shade as a fresh bite of ruby. It seemed to bleed from the fringes, or at least lurch over its perfectly circular inverse edges, draped over the institution like a funeral shawl. Cheryl says it's an asteroid or something, but the distinction was strictly arbitrary. There was nothing we could do to stop it.

I moved in on my 17th birthday; I was 27, I think? (Don't get me started on ages...) \_\_\_\_\_ told me about the place & we decided to split the rent, which was kinda funny cos we both shared an income? It was like this abandoned old schoolhouse built upside-down & backwards, though it all seemed like a normal place to live on the inside once you made it through the windows.

NÆL was this lovely red 1 who owned the whole place & rented it *gratis*. All it asked was momentary bouts of possession, if you'd like; no pressure. We made a deal to set boundaries, but after a while I couldn't shake its influence. I started trying to kill my new friends / roommates — pointless, really, since nothing ever dies here... at least... it's impossible to... you know... There's no easy way out.

I befriended all the other students pretty fast, after an eternity of sulking: ———, Heather, Cheryl, Josie, NÆL, Avelyn, \_\_\_\_\_.

These girls were more or less interchangeable. Except, of course, for Avelyn. She was like a mother to us, some more than others, albeit strictly in a sexual sense. She was 666 years old when we met (I was 13 & / or 31(???)) & we got along real nice, although she refused to tell me anything else about her.

Things went on like that for a couple of months until Josie wound up missing for no reason. Just seven days before then Avelyn turned her into a doll & thirteen hours after that or before we found her, maybe

later, I can't remember... There were rumors she'd been taken by nightbreed, or joined them or something. I said it sounds like you've been watching too many movies. But they were worried whatever was out there would come for me too. So together they entrusted me with a talisman to keep me imperceptible from the monsters at the fringes of reality.

The acid started kicking in & I was staring at the posters on the wall. Rockstars breathed soft & beckoned my ass. Naturally, I obliged. What can I say? I'm nasty as hell. Shit escalated.

I was getting 'Eiffel Tower'-ed by Lou Reed & Iggy Pop when my roommate walked right through my door. This wasn't my fault. They should've heard me crying out in orgasm, or at the very least, knocked.

There was this weird tiff, some empty accusations, but none of that really mattered; it was all just a dream, I think? Whatever. I finished jacking off (or woke up; I can't remember) pissed & showered & put on headphones & smoked enough weed for paranoia to finally set in & listened to Animal Collective's *Strawberry Jam* or something like that clutching aforementioned talisman until my knuckles turned pink from the effort.

I found the ragdoll in the sands, drenched & soaked in salt smell. I'm not gonna lie, big bodies of water always freaked me out. They make me feel so small & natural & uncomplicated, when I know that's not true, despite whatever bullshit my therapist says. What does that bitch know that I don't? & where the fuck does she get off telling me I ain't better off alone? I've been in my head all these years more than any of her. No one else. I'm smarter than that.

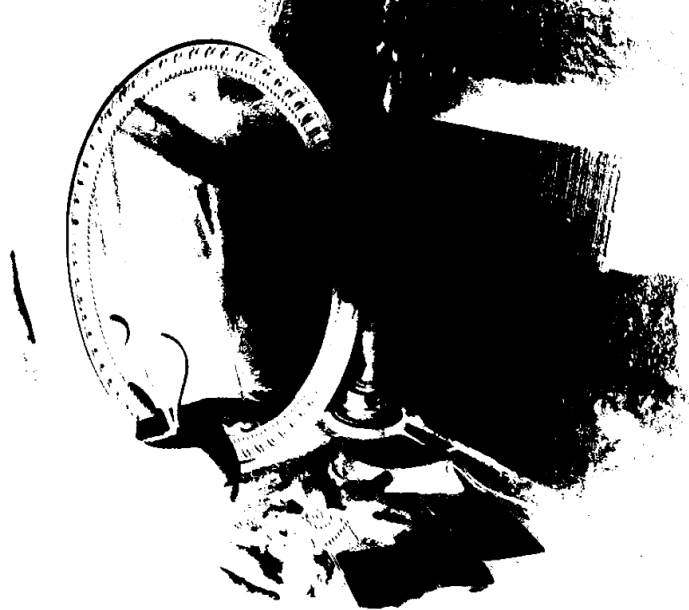
I wrung Jodie out best I could skipping back into town stopped & picked up some soap & coffee, tried to clean her off, but just wound up accidentally spilling cream & sugar all over her shit. "Fuck, uhh..."

Everything I touched turns so sticky & *wrong*... If I'm being real here I hate the way acid makes my body *feel*, like I have one in the first place. If I had one wish I'd make myself something less than nothing, like a word that goes unused & forgotten off-page. Not even a name.

I knew this was bullshit, but Avelyn often warned us of the monsters down by the water. Vile creatures who embraced their nature instead of finding the will to change it. “Look inside yourself,” she told us, held hostage in another one of her rambling drunken lectures, “tell me what you see, & I’ll tell you *why* you’re wrong.” She argued her purity was tarnished or something & we were all to blame, but she expected this; we were human, after all. “Born to make mistakes.”

I couldn’t turn away from what was happening. The smell alone made me puke. Cold empty dread shot straight through my veins. Each new incision, every impact filled my head up with cotton, like a connection to myself had been severed right between my eyes with an icepick. But I felt myself getting hard, & there was this feeling I couldn’t place; something I hadn’t felt since, *oh*, since I was much too young to feel that way to begin with? Huh. Blood red light broke the fog & I was very sad all the sudden & I couldn’t stop the tears flowing from my eyes, turning my vision blurry as it pooled around my feet.

I looked in my hand & NÆL held it like I was a child & became something more or less like a dagger; bright & sharp & portentous. Something of utility. I took a deep breath & gathered my strength & waited for my turn as she gnawed through the others like a kid with a big bag of Halloween candy. I would only get one shot at this.



## VII

### AUTOGYNEFICTION

Years before all this I bought a bunch of drugs from my sister (no relation). ‘You wanna see something cool?’ She slid open her desk & pulled out a vape. ‘Wanna try?’ Took my hand closer, guided me through the motions. Said sister had a chemistry degree & used this along with some very legitimate lab equipment to synthesize DMT & had been experimenting in making carts. ‘Yea sure...’ I trembled with delight; we were warm & fuzzy, cozy onesies, lights all purple pink beautiful — I’d put on SOPHIE’s OIL OF EVERY PEARL’S UN-INSIDES remix album — one of my favorite albums to fuck to — & I just cried for a while for no reason other than I was so incredibly high & this was the greatest music I’d ever heard in my life — & I was peaking, which probably flavored my emotions greatly. Who can say? The moments between here & there dissolved entirely on the drug; I figured hey, why not? & she was so fucking pretty — I regret all the fucking we never did, even back then — though I hold all those moments sacred all the same; she was my sister, after all (no relation). ‘How do I...’ ‘You gotta hit it again.’ Inhale, deep, room buzzing wire sheet tinnitus; a light, airy note that sounds like the end of days; that’s how I’d describe it. If Gabriel has a trumpet it’ll sound like the world’s tiniest violin. ‘Yea?’ Her room is a lot of posters for cult Japanese movies about fucked up shit & now it’s made out of fur. Starting to blink, sigh. I sank back into the bed. ‘Yeaasdfghjjjzxcvbnm,’ words trailing into drone, every sound like I’m dipped into a pool of electricity, or dial-up ringtone. You remember phones? Something grazes my fingers & I realize it’s her hand & I look down & I’m covered with fur ha ha & it’s like the jelly choker I’m wearing is a collar, wouldn’t that be funny? When I was, like, 8 I got in trouble for wearing my dog’s collar; I should’ve known ha ha (Her name was. Sandy Beach, BTW. I named her this. I was very proud of that.) ‘Don’t do that,’ dad’d say, ‘What if she runs out? They put stray dogs down, you know.’ Well, whose fucking

fault would that be, anyways, leaving the door open? *fuck* I didn't want to think of that now — I blinked & met all my new friends in an instant; angels, I think? Demons? Fffuuuck That's from a movie i think ha well ??????? regardless... ... Whew. It felt like my brain was unfurling every durrrrrrection but cross-crossing x x x-ing all over with itself, like, ha ha ha I started *laughing*? & I didn't even know why? I felt like maybe I was gonna piss myself... which would've been ok, it's okay to piss yourself, it's okay to piss every where so long as it's mutual, right? I mean, this, isn't my bed or apartment I'm not gonna piss here without asking forest but ha welll if I asked it'd be okay? Oh, ask, who'd I ask of *course* I'd forgotten about! Her (?)? She was looking at me with twenty eyes in her head, blinking in & out as the see bed overgrew us; the hairs of her rug whiorming upwards up up! Tendrilous & & she looked at me so bright & beautiful — skin aglow alight all thru the rainbeau BTW did you ever seen *Enter the Void* (2009)??? Wwweelll it's was basically *a lot* like that but trippier — actually, now that I think about it that movie ki1nda *totally* pisses me off! that's not what a trip feels like but okayy maybe that's movie actually pretty accurate... come to think about about it... hah well that's neither here nor whaeuver... the thing — the thin that you *can't* do in a film ( an audio/visual format ) is the way language completely breaks down in a way, it does on druigs. Like. This is gonna sound wierd but like when I was 3 or so I mean I don't have actually any memories back then but I *do* have an imprint of them. Because, like, my lil baby brain hadn't developed enough to ununderstand what anything was or going on about because, like, okay! Youd on't have the WORDS for it yettt & that's basically what it's like when you're *there* on (DMT); you can't bring that shit back *with you* !!! N E V E R !!! 'ZZXXFKANCT' her lips buzzed, soft cherry bulbous & oh so very inviting. yessss. (I like this very much). I'm not sure if I'd call it love, the feeling, but whatever the feeling is, I'm in love with it. So I move closer o h g o d she's so much bigger than I thought up close hah 'Why are you laughing???' Sh sh I stutter & she grabs me by the neck & throws me to the bed. ( 'Arf!' ) her

hair & nails & teeth — (*I go weak inside*). My mouth is numb from the alcohol in the vape cart & she's looking at me from above spiral halo form fff i c i just can't STAND it . *Kiss me*, utters what's last of my coherency. *No*, she sighs, hand to my throat. Her thigh is warm & pressed against my side; shirt's that's hiked up enough to feel her pulse. My stockings cling tight & delicious ran over hers & (Oh). *Not yet*. She's still ~~here~~ *there* eyes like diamond jagged rip & shred me apart into ripple ribbon string & I sigh a cloud of gray ash. I whimper; she takes notice. It takes a moment to recognize the kiss. Becuase it its uhmmsmh fractured everywhere all wh whateverrrr like ten million thousnfractals kissesess I've ever had squished up into *one* — time froze — subatancew et & flowing through my mouth, down my throatjawflex wet/cold shiver exhal e ee into her tongue return *it ah* Sour apple sugar shit; all the while in her soft warm glowed purple-flesh? Then metallic, rimmed & ultrabrite reverberating cycled metal flux striations; the fruur became rigdged; reality a knife; every blink tessellated raw lightning flash neon glowmeat shower of pissshock wriggling pass/t each other. ??? Deeper entwined 'til I started crying — *what's wrong?* I couldn't tell her where I was, what was happening — the details were much too sordid — (*nothing personal.*) She took my hand: held me close, until the tears I had'nt realized were being shed dried up leaving snail trails down along my flustered cheeks. *My angel* she said. wings engulfed me & held soft warm & I focused on the rhythm of my sister's breath & her closeness & when I closed my eyyes I was someplace very gentil & amnioitic — & marveled before Revelation: Thee distinction between Life & Death is completely meaning less (?) . Something is always happening to you, wheather you're here for it or

not.

We sobered up a bit & ordered pad thai & when my other sister (no relation) picked me up I felt this feeling I can't describe & I told her that

I loved her for the very first time & while I'm not so sure if I really meant anything I said back then because I was still high as hell though it doesn't really matter in the end I guess so long as it feels like I felt it.



## FURTHER REGIONS

‘ Oh... Uhh...’ Her thoughts weren’t quite together yet.

The Girl Without A Name also had a bad habit of not being there.

In a daydream The Girl Without A Name let the Hitachi Magic d (Wireless/Rechargeable) roll off the bed with a *thunk*, took too y drugs or else killed herself; I can't remember which. But she ed the sheets nonetheless.

Always the same dream; the chamber of doors once more.

This time, The Girl Without A Name pressed her face to each of the 22, mapping out their warmth & texture with a profound care & clarity. It was hard to remain lucid here very long, so she took a little prayer out from her pocket, written just for this occasion:

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DE	RY.
A	E

212

future; there were no dated artifacts, plus her phone was dead, so there wasn't any time, or place, so she couldn't pin down *when*. But she really didn't care, because this chick's dick game was immaculate. All the same, it was all too much, just a little too hot to handle. She started to cry in the present & her Partner Who Wasn't There held her once more, pressed deep into the small of her back, '*It's okay baby. I've got you...*' But a familiar smell took her back someplace else.

Another time, years from now or ago, who knows? Who really cares... The Girl Without A Name felt drunk on her power... But the knifeplay helped, as did the \$7 shoplifted doggy chain collar & the Cialis her doctor had prescribed. She was deep up someone else's ass for a change; it felt nice, this sense of dominion; but like everything else it freaked her the fuck out. It reminded her of this fantasy she'd had long ago... Her first, actually, at her therapist's suggestion: 'Put all the images in language in place of safety & make use of them'... or something... (*Was* that her therapist? Nevermind.)

In a notebook she had left at an ex's house, The Girl Without A Name wrote some masturbatory bullshit about this Safe Lovely Dream Girl she came up with (because fantasizing about real people seemed... weird? & she didn't want to be weird...) & this Safe Lovely Dream Girl was insanely hot, just, like, *wow*. She was *perfect*. A little too perfect, perhaps; her first iteration made The Girl Without A Name feel dysphoric. Further versions rendered her less & less fish, until The Girl Without A Name tired of the term itself & stopped worrying so hard about what she was into. (She had a body. She was real. Was this not itself beautiful enough?)

The Girl Without A Name didn't know what to do with her. At first she stuck strictly to violence. All the worst shit she feared she might hold inherent, for whatever reason. (Sometimes when she looked in the mirror she didn't see a girl at all but a monster — a beautiful monster, sure, but monstrous nonetheless. Many years from now she would rid herself of this shame; at the present, however, The Girl Without A Name had no clue *what* she was or where she'd wind up inevitably.) *But*

*that's so silly*, she said to herself; at least, it didn't make any sense, not here, not within the confines of her diary. She decided it was best to keep all these embarrassing words a harmless little secret.

After seven days of failed attempts broken up between bad acid binges & even worse Grindr hookups The Girl Without A Name came up with a whole scene & played the scenario out over & over & over: The Girl Without A Name, newly rechristened The Girl With A Name Who Wasn't Real meets aforementioned Safe Girl (for short), uhhhh, dancing at the club?? (The Girl Without A Name wasn't very creative.) They're drawn to each other with an animalistic intensity & complete obliviousness to the other dykes. So they get drinks & step out for a smoke & get to know each other a bit before going back to the Safe Girl's apartment, which is all sleek & neon & very IKEA; the details aren't very important.

Only, that's what it felt like. But soon reality kicked in & she remembered where she'd blacked it all out. What *actually* happened was The Girl With A Name Who Wasn't Real got drugged by this Safe Girl (I suppose that name was a bit misleading, but hey, this isn't my fantasy), causing them to swap places & become each other. & the one (unclear *which*) dragged the other out to her car, tied her up, put her in the trunk, then drove her home, where they had insanely hot, violent, druggy (consensual (?) (at least, in her heart; better not overthink it.), maybe? (probably it was okay?)) (Yeah. 100% consensually non-consensual. Okay. Cool. Got it.) Got it.), *life-affirming sex* with The Girl With A Name Who Wasn't Real, who got hurt really bad & bled a lot & drank pee & bruised up & kept getting choked so hard she'd see a bunch of fucked up shit, like fractals & symbols that reminded her of staring up at ceilings during trips, looked kind of like they were trying to tell her something but (as far as she could tell) weren't any kind of human language, but it all seemed so profound or whatever & so on & so forth until The Girl Without A Name writing it all down had had her fill of describing this crap & felt overcome with shame because something so awful shouldn't *feel* this good, right?

A long time passed without anything nice worth repeating being put down on these pages. Her fantasies grew increasingly dark & explicit, as did the intensity of self-judgment. The Girl Without A Name made a refrain of these nightmares in the hopes they'd become realer than real & eventually supplant whatever grasp she had left on her boring reality.

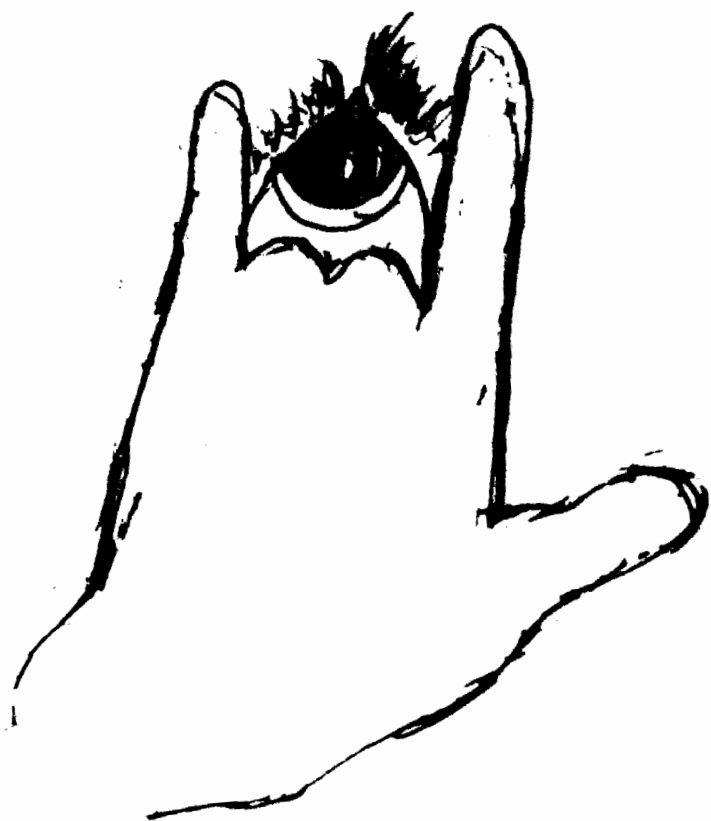
Amongst all the blood & other such fluids her writing began to speak out for itself in protest. "Whoever you are, please. LISTEN. We are hurt. We are suffering. It follows you would be suffering as well."

It took a while for the words to register inside herself. The Girl Without A Name started to cry. & when she was done, she picked up her pen & decided to append a happier ending to these violent dreams.

But before all that, she took out her journal, & asked herself very carefully what precisely her body needed, here & now, detached from the realms of fiction or fantasy.

The Girl Without A Name remembered the first time she slept with her last ex. The sex was okay. Nothing mind-blowing. But there was this moment after the fact, when they were done, where they curled up along each other, face pressed against her chest, no sound but her heartbeat, the rise & fall of every breath.

She closed her eyes & imagined an ocean, waves crashing on the shore, sucking her under, so she became completely subsumed. When she blinked it was gone, more or less. The least she could do to bring it back was invent a simulacrum of itself in a composition notebook she kept beside her bedside tucked away inside a drawer lost to rot & overgrowth & eventually torn asunder & annihilated like everything else there ever was many years from now in the great floods still yet to come.



precious. Fake                      You've lost touch                      .                      get  
yourself to death.                      standards                      ruin                      you.                      drink  
time talking, not                      become obsessed by sex.                      spend all your  
k n o

w i  
n g



## V

### FOREVER

The last time I messaged you on Twitter 13 minutes later I found out you were dead. I saw you were reading *Porpentine* & I wanted to ask what you thought but by then it was too late to talk about it. I'll never know if you finished that book or how you died, & I'd like to keep it that way. So please, if you know, spare me the details. Some things are better left up to mystery.

I'm grateful at least I had the chance to tell you how much your writing meant to me & how much I stole from it. I was worried for a second there I might not even get the chance. Every other time I messaged you you were going through something awful, but I didn't want you to think I was worried, so I kept my mouth shut & stayed quiet. I really wish I hadn't. There's nothing much now left to say.

The first time I messaged you you wanted to do my horoscope. You showed me yours & I noted the similarities between our charts. Part of me wondered if I was you in a past life, but I didn't want to be weird, so I never asked if you knew where my future would bring me.

I wish I'd been more of a faggot when you were still around. It could've been beautiful. If anyone told me I could've been a slut when I was younger like you I would've, but I was too busy getting molested to figure any of that gay shit out. Sorry, I guess?

Do you know just how badly I wanted to fuck you? I never got the chance to tell you. You were on the cover of my book, after all. There were conflicts of interest. Regardless, I'll admit it: I wrote a couple sex scenes based on stuff we did that one week when you stayed with me but I changed most of it so you wouldn't catch on I was only fucking you back then so I could write about how I was fucking you.

Not sure why I'm telling you any of this to begin with. You're never gonna get the chance to read it. I just felt like I ought to put all the words down somewhere. If only to remind myself you were real.

I used to think death was some profound mystic holy transformative process but it just fucking sucks. You were here & now you're not. Nothing else.

So there's no way to know what you'd make of any of this. But I imagine if you were still alive you'd want me to make whatever this was kinda weird & uncomfortably vulnerable. So I made myself a gash for you to slither in & wear me for a while. How does it feel?

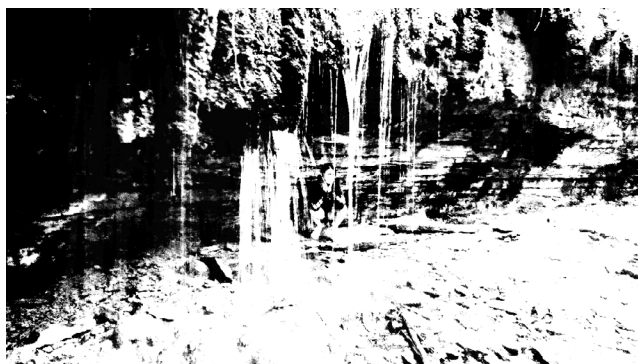
I've been doing droppers of acid again almost every day because of that one chapter in your book. I still hate the stuff, but I wanna believe it'll bring us closer to some state of emergency. Pathetic, I know, but I want others to worry about me the way I used to worry about you. I'm deciding maybe it's best I should start with myself.

For the longest time I thought it'd be easier to rip me up & just start over from scratch. Reincarnation or whatever. But I could never figure out how to do it cleanly, without making a fuss, without leaving a mess. Everyone leaves behind something. So I'll just have to wait & try to be good until it's actually time to go. I don't wanna have to come back & they're pissed.

Last night I drank an entire box of wine & ugly cried to *Celebrity Skin* again. I jacked off & never came because I'm a miserable sad piece of shit & I hate myself & all I do is watch bad porn & get high & cry all the fucking time. Is that what you wanted to hear? Are you happy now?

...Oh, shit, right. I forgot. You're not her. I'm so sorry. How very silly of me.

I drank too much cough syrup last night after work & got a migraine headache watching *Adventure Time* wishing you or someone else or anyone really were there to hold me. & yea, you could, but I'd hate to ask for anything, especially now. I want you to *know* without needing to say it. I wished I was clairvoyant, or maybe a medium. But I don't think ghosts would want to talk to me, specifically.



IX

# KEEP IT LIKE A SECRET



never was supposed to end in dreams was always different streets of gold  
or some profound drowned amber should've been you instead yast  
prostitute & kiss the very ground lay your body on sleepless nights  
chuckle for aching feet drag over broken glass & took another few p  
one more than so this must be beautiful again oh i've never heard of  
they're glowing december when did tickets get so fucking expensive lets  
though i don't want to leave this place i'm so fucking cold & scared there  
on we no lady back from where i'm from we wanted nothing more than some  
sucker to hold our hair while we vomit and whisper all we got instead  
a constant nothing where a tongue still in that pretty mouth of yours or  
what bodies look like years after not being alive anymore could we still  
trace the outline of your shape sad i know but we always knew the ending  
from the start it's like someone said how bad news always comes when you  
least expect or something not like i regret it jesus no not at all i'd do it all  
over again the same but i need you to steal the memory from me i'll never  
find what i've lost in this place there's no coming back where i'm leaving  
from now but the abyssal won't be here for quite a while so please just stay  
i won't lose the last thing you forget except for maybe the part where it  
actually happened but all things must fade maybe it's better off this way  
because death is not a muse at all you take what you put into this  
wisdom gathered without lust is no epiphany isn't anything

Because at the  
own my boundaries meant  
acting like a asset and  
because it wasn't me i never  
inner at all i am they  
essentially boundaries  
as much as the constraint  
i was trapped in  
of the recent be  
inward the phrase rarely let



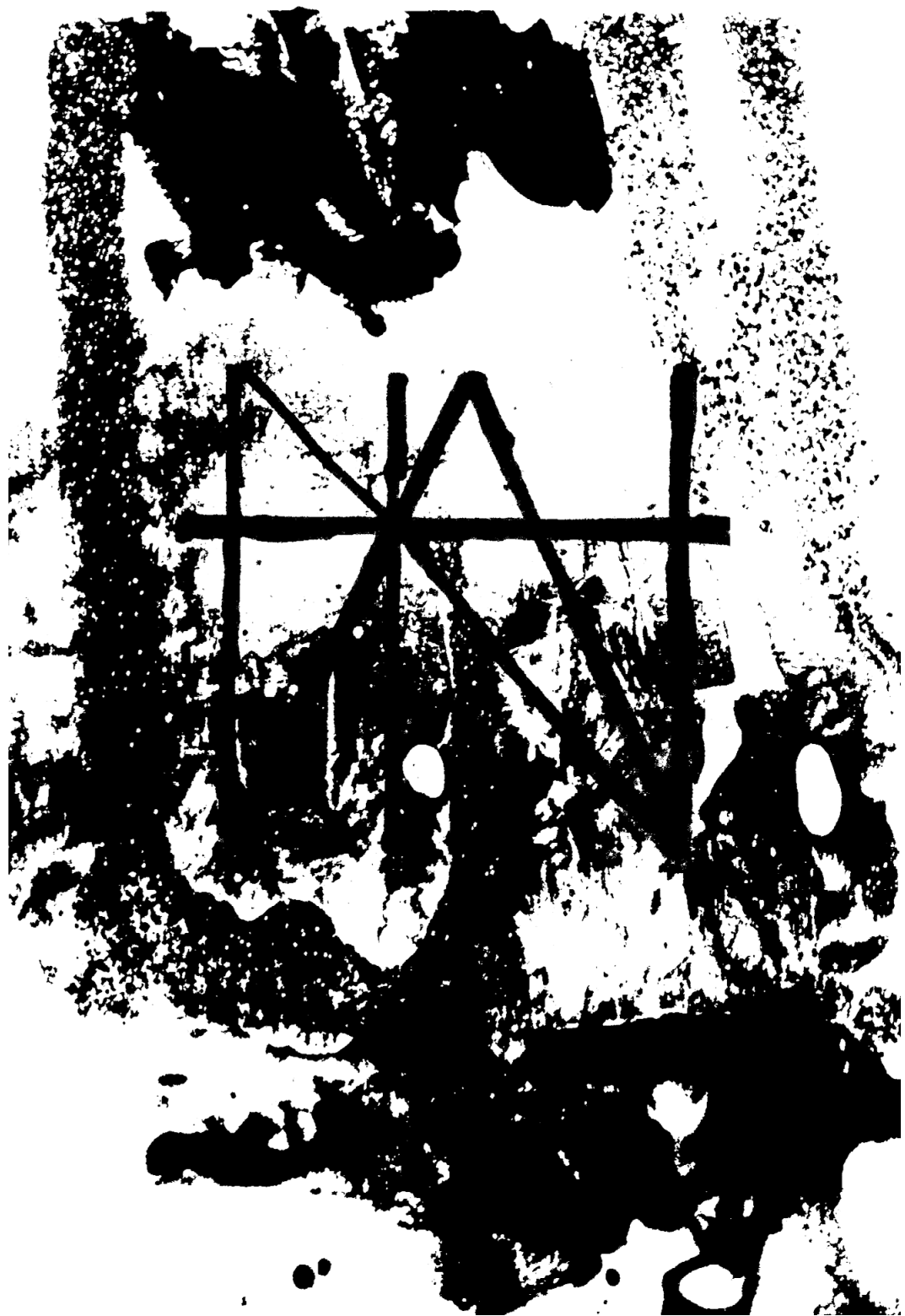
all over the world

And the  
The 100

How many  
Days  
Can I  
Live

102  
Saur

She keeps me in a constant  
state of wisdom & guidance.





**X**

## NEVER KNOWS BEST





“It’s okay to just want more.”  
– Blink-182, ‘*Emo*’

# LOST DOGS RARITIES & B-SIDES



SELECTED AMATEUR WORKS 18-23  
( UNFINISHED / UNREQUITED / UNRESOLVED )

THE FIRST KILL was as accident. Honest. Instinct took over. I was cornered, and besides, the bitch had a gun. So I plunged the switchblade into her neck up to the hilt and bled her all over me. All her wet gushing warm down my arms and chest. Soaked my flannel and denim matte black. Nauseous warmth washed over like a key bump as I felt her own fading. Face turned white. Eyes gone empty. Drip down the back of my throat. She slumped over backwards and that was that. Knife still stuck up her windpipe. I pulled it loose and my dick got hard as her body leaked deep red all over the filthy puke-green bathroom tile. Then Slint walked in and saw me standing there. Didn't seem very surprised; stoned, maybe. This was for the best, I suppose. There wasn't any time for us to lose our shit. So it helped me slip the corpse out the window. We looped around the back and helped Willow drag it to the tour bus. Drove out for a while. Dismembered it together in a corn field just outside Jacksonville. Willow kept a hatchet on the bus ever since the last time she got raped, but we hadn't had the chance to break it in 'til then. So we took turns passing back and forth, hack it apart piece by piece. Bitch came apart quite nicely. Big mess all over the grass but separated very clean regardless. Like doll parts or cuts of beef. Slint rolled a joint as we chopped her up real good. Laced it with something special, so the embers of her charred bits shimmered and sparkled like diamonds in the hot summer night. It took the head aside for later. Boiled it in a steel pot so all the flesh and brains would slough off the bone like stock meat. Bus reeked like spoiled pork and eggs for weeks. Slint's done this every kill so far. Smells awful, but you get used to it after a while. Soon enough it's like frankincense. We'd string the skulls 'round the roof of the bus 'til we'd get back to our little farmhouse in out in Texas. Not sure what Slint's doing with 'em, but I just know it's gonna be the death of us. Never thought to keep count, neither. But Willow carved a notch in the back of her guitar for each and every one of the fuckers. So I asked her real nice last night over whiskey and cigarettes. To which she replied, simply:

*"Six hundred and sixty-six."*

# THERE WAS A HOLE HERE.

Just big enough to slip on through. Must have cut myself a bit pulling me out because of all the blood. Here was so dark at first I couldn't see a thing until I noticed a single weird red prick of light hanging above like a sword on a string. Like a star or something. Well I was cold & about as naked as I came in the first place. I couldn't remember my name because my body had yet to become something substantial. Without form I had no reason to eat or sleep or do anything at all. Time passed forever until the world held nothing for me. Every surface was exactly the same. Shiny & smooth. It was all so icy cold to the touch except for all the warm blood which helped me to know where I'd been already. It was all so awful fucking boring. But at least nothing could hurt me any more because I finally couldn't feel a thing. Whatever texture I discovered was swiftly erased & forgotten. At last it was empty except for the light which after forever had barely gotten brighter. This is dumb I think to myself despite existing completely formless without a single fucking thought. Naturally because of this I couldn't think of any good reasons left to stay. There was nothing left nothing hadn't given me already. & besides without a mind I couldn't know what to think anymore. So since I had nothing better left to do I learned to hate it here. I managed to extrapolate a reflection from whatever void hate could not account for. It was scary at first. I no longer left a trail of blood wherever I went so I got lost out here fast & trailed off into sand & glass & water. Without blood I could no longer find my way back although I knew I'd be back here again when it was over. I've died so many times already. Problem was I didn't have a soul. Or whatever I had instead didn't even count as one. Then all the sudden enough anything was there I remembered what & where this here was now. My head or something like it started to hurt really bad. Every time I finally become enough of anything to sleep & dream every time they rip me apart & swallow us up over & over & over & over & over & over & over & over & over & over

been out here in the woods fucking dogs all the time lately. i aint had nothing better to do really. besides they always smoke me out and theyre really quite nice actually even if a bit rough. that last one i fucked we did dabs in its rv & it left a bunch of cum & wax dripping down my leg mixed with the blood. im not complaining

i limp blushing back into town barely dressed wearing shredded clothes wearing a harness of thoughtless bites collared round my neck & blood running down & everyone wouldnt stop staring. thoughtless yes but dogs dont think. dogs just do. they wanna piss they piss. they wanna fuck they fuck. god i wish that were me

my boss fired me for coming 27 minutes late but mostly for smoking pot in the bathroom all the time. they drove me out with a broom & some words id rather not repeat here

that dog fucked me again, but this time i wasnt there at all my body was enough to get fucked in the first place but i was watching from the clearing & i couldnt feel it hurt when it forced its way inside me. i could only make out

they look at me weird in checkout lines. maybe its all the blood & the nudity or probably just the presence alone. im too tall to make myself disappear completely & im not getting any smaller. im not getting any younger either. it is good to remember

i was listening to the some sad indie for whatever reason so many years ago & getting way too drunk & high that night. probably depressed. & all i could think was how much i felt the same but knew there was only so much i could relate i never learned how to drive no one i knew died & my body is not a cage. my body is a door & i swallowed the keys

\* \* \*

You swallowed the shell then spat buckshot back out thru your fractured teeth. Brain matter splattered all over the back wall and you watched it trickle down. Not enough to keep you off your feet. You ran the razor down your forearms but the bleeding just never stopped. You left a snail trail of blood and puke across your neighborhood after downing all the pills in the cabinet with every chemical beneath the sink. No one seemed to notice. You came back home, filled the tub with gasoline you siphoned from the neighbors and knocked the toaster into the bath with you. The current fried your brain, tickling your innards as the flaming shower curtain draped over your convulsive body. Still you brushed the ashes off like it was nothing. So you took a bourbon nap on the tracks just down the way. Your neck derailed a train in your sleep, killing every passenger on board. You woke up to smoldering wreckage and helicopter coverage. Firefighters struggled to extinguish the forest nearby. You fingered the bruise wrapped around your throat like a choker. You needed to get more creative.

Just then ‘Ocean Avenue’ came on the classic rock station. Whiskey lingering on Amethyst’s breath began to take on a more nostalgic dimension. *Oh shit yeah*, she turned it up, started singing along.

Vanessa couldn’t help but laugh.

She was nineteen and Amy was, what, sixteen? Seventeen?

Her dealer snuck them into the Warped Tour then got her drunk and spiked Van’s Mountain Dew. But on the come-up they caught the last third of a Yellowcard show. They were supposed to keep an eye on each other but they lost all sense in the pit. Stupid sisters locked in orbit bashing up against each other. Bodies in play.

In the backseat of her car, on the dirty old blankets mom had left her the winter after it first broke down; they kissed.

She was asking for it; it was wrong but that only made her crazier.

Probably the drugs; bodies in perfect alchemical symmetry.

But then she noticed Amy had blacked out and they stopped.

There were some lines she simply couldn’t bring herself to cross.

I SHOULD'VE WRITTEN SOONER.

You're probably asking already, like: "Where the hell did you get this address?" Or: "Who the fuck still owns a typewriter?"

To which I would reply: What kind of girl still keeps a VCR? You always had such appreciation for aesthetics, the way CRT's flicker obscured the finer points in all the rightest ways.

You were right; I don't think "Blair Witch" is anywhere near as scary viewed on any other format. You always understood the imperfections of a medium as what made the art itself human.

So it may come as a shock after all these years to find my own face so perfectly preserved from your memory.

It may take some time to even make me out in the blur: the night is deep, and we're all pale as shit. Travis really did his best with the lighting. We were going for something gothic, like "The Crow." We wanted to make a backdrop out of shadows.

Here's a hint: Trace the blood between the shots. Not just the pavement, but the flesh. Note the bruises, how they're placed. Imagine all the footage left behind on the cutting room floor. In their absence I've distilled the last three years of my life into sixty minutes, soundtracked by darkwave, post-punk and The Misfits. Apologies in advance if this comes across as clichéd.

Perhaps you've wondered where I've been. Maybe you'll scan the skylines from the fisheye low angle shots. I doubt you could stitch them together conclusively. We lost track of cities in the days between trains.

Do you know how many takes it took to get that laser flip down the staircase, by the way? It's all in the foot placement, and the timing. It's mostly just luck until you figure out a combination that works.

I hope I don't come across as vain. But I need you to see this. When our bodies go we leave nothing else behind. This tape could be the only proof we ever even existed.

I've seen so many die over so much dumb shit. Some of them are even in this video. You wouldn't get to meet them any other way. Some just passed out drunk outside before sunrise. Others were addicts who'd

get fucked and forget that last drop fucking kills. Most were just suicides simply got tired being living dead. Passed out on a stake like Elliot Smith with the knife. You wouldn't know they had gone if they hadn't left a note.

You remember that first night, at the punk show? You told me I was crazy and I showed you Venus above the Moon and you took my hand, led me from the fire, deep behind the trees, and you fucked me on the forest floor? I always envied your sense of planning. Not many girls would've thought to bring lube.

I took up skating when you moved in the summer. I needed something to waste my time, and dating just made me sad about you. Plus I didn't want to let all your crap go to waste.

You can't make it out very well because the graphic's all fucked from grinds but that's your deck in the tape in a few of the shots. You remember. The one with the pink and green your ex gave you. The one you said was okay for me to borrow.

That was the greatest gift I could never asked for. I wouldn't have met them if it wasn't for you leaving. I was working 9 to 5 and you know how fall is. I thought the park would be empty after dark. But they were always there, waiting for me.

I really wish I could tell you more but I've already meandered so much. Besides, I don't think I could do the story justice here. I'd much rather tell you in person.

Now you're dying I fear I might never get the chance. I wanted to tell you all those years ago what was happening. But even if I could find you back then I don't think you'd believe me.

I'm so sorry I couldn't be there for you through all of that.

This town didn't feel the same without you and it's different now that you're back again. All our old haunts are gone or remodeled. Streets were repaved, graffiti painted over, buildings burned down, then built back up again. The apartment we shared in those precious few months is broken down and dilapidated. Kids came by over the nights with bricks and busted all the windows out. Rumor has it just before dawn

you can make out voices from inside its walls. What I wouldn't give to hear yours again. When you write back: do you think of me still?

The way I see it we have a few options. You could live out the rest of your days as you were. I would miss you dearly, always, but I could sleep a little easier knowing you had known where I've been.

I never meant to make you worry so much. It hasn't been as hard as you'd think, honest. Money wasn't ever an issue. We stole everything we wanted. We skated the same malls we robbed, floating from state to state, body to body. We slept outside, in tunnels, beneath bridges. Cold was nothing; in fact, I found the numb freeze comforting. We never went hungry all those years. There were always local rapists to be found, and barring that, police.

The irony in our condition is it doesn't keep the body from harm. It isn't invincibility. If you cut me I still bleed. My bones still break the same as yours. But we differ in capacity for healing.

On the second tape enclosed you'll find the worst of my bails. They're not very pretty. I'm not sure you still have the stomach you used to, all those nights ago, taking shots through your collection of "Faces of Death". It might be difficult to see my own face split apart, pulverized, demolished. But I need you to see what you could survive, should you follow down this path with us. I need you to see me from the inside out on the pavement.

It's not like I'm numb. I still feel it. It still hurts like hell, unless you damage the nerves, and even then trust me: the absence of feeling is worse. There's something else supposed to be there. But knowing you'll stay alive makes all the difference in the world.

I want you there with me when I need to heal again. I want to be one there for you when you heal as well. I want you to need to heal from something to begin with. It's the least that I can do.

Do you really want to live forever?

You'll know exactly where to find me.

— X.

\* \* \*

I found a place beneath the water where the others couldn't find me. I could stay here as long as I wanted, but it was cold, & bottomless, which kind of freaked me out? But the others wouldn't follow me past the shore, & eventually they'd get bored & wander off, knowing we'd run into each other again eventually.

I started gathering up the pieces of me I'd find scattered throughout. An arm here, a leg there, bones jutting out rotting scraps of meat — whichever parts the others had decided not to eat. I'd bring the pieces out to the water, swim to the center, start binding them together with excised nerves & veins & arteries. It was long & lonesome work, but there was nothing else to do between lives, really, and said lives didn't last very long, since I cut myself everytime I came out from the hole.

Though I think the others started getting bored. For a while they stayed at the hole, devouring me immediately. I guess they must've had their fill, or maybe they got bored. Who's to say. I couldn't tell.

After a while, there was a platform on the water, with a trapdoor in the middle. I wove blankets from my hair and kept myself warm in eternal night, watching others pass me by, staring out from across the way. I'd planned to build a tower upside down — someplace to stay, at least for now. But this would prove difficult. I was running out of the remnants to build from. Besides, even if this place was safe, it was starting to reek of piss & blood & shit. I'd accomplished so much, & yet I couldn't stop my senses from returning. Awareness sharpened like a pen. I hungered for something, but I wasn't sure what it was to begin with.

The light above grew brighter, something resembling moonlight. I looked across the others, witnessed death waiting for me on the other side, waiting patient. I looked into the water, and for the first time in forever I could make out my reflection. She was beginning to look like someone I knew from another life.

My mother said I should keep a journal so I know I probably shouldn't. I don't want anyone to give a shit what I've got to think.

I'm 20 years old, which gives me less than a year to pretend I'm naive before older men run out of excuses to sneak me drinks under the bar. They'll have to serve me over it instead. They'll make me drink in front of everyone else instead of that little cubby in the back with the shades you can draw shut. All but the most Libertarian of them would consider this a 'bad look.' When you're as old as them you really don't wanna be frank just how young you're willing to go.

Obviously I'm unbothered, moisturized, thriving, etcetera. My dad doesn't know I'm a girl yet, and my sister doesn't know why all her clothes keep disappearing. Let's just keep it that way for now.

Can I let you in on a little secret?

\* \* \*

*Okay okay i dont' know i f i can do this any m re. I dont wanna be weird is it too l te to go b ck? stop i t all fom happnenng. nd it is alw ys happ n ng. why come it never st ps. i don t wan a talk a out this. I don t w nna think abo t th s. c n we go h me n w*

\* \* \*

have we been here before us ? together ? make our decisions, remember where & what you are. burst from the fire into the ocean breathed the water deep shivered through lifeless lungs clenched icy depths eaten weird little fishes nibbled clean bones & all sink & dissipate through icy depths tickled pink again. not used to all the attention? when i laugh confuse this with affection; not a threat; not in mockery. reroute the sensation. why do you think we're writing this in the first place?

IT DIDN'T HIT until her feet touched the ground just how *drunk* Heather was. Almost nearly bailed flat down on her face. She barely managed to catch herself by clutching at the overgrowth along the grassy knoll. Warm bile burbled up in her throat, all the wine and sweets they'd scarfed down the moment they'd both noticed that car headed towards them from way far off in the distance.

Thankfully, Heather was much too good a drunk to let herself barf. She clenched and swallowed, ignoring the raw, sour taste that now clung to the back of her throat like a half-melted Jolly Rancher.

She heard the fence rattle behind her and whipped around in time to catch Alessa swinging her leg over the studded black leather jacket draped across the barbed wire Heather mounted only moments before.

But she didn't follow through with the motion. Alessa froze up there, a deer in the headlights. Moments passed outside herself, straddled ten feet up staring down past the headstones. Heather screamed. Alessa didn't even hear what she said. She just turned away from the glow and let herself fall.

Heather watched this whole scene play out in slow-motion like some kind of cheap horror movie. Alessa seemed to levitate above the ground, her body forming a perfect arcing silhouette framed against the bright and chain-link, as if she were frozen in ice.

By the time she realized what the fuck was happening she couldn't really do anything about it. Her lungs burned white and snot ribboned from her nostrils but she couldn't make herself move fast enough.

Alessa hit the dirt with a *thud* and a yelp. Heather rushed to her writhing body and yanked her to her feet. '*Omigodareyouokay?*'

Alessa let out a groan. '*Just shut up and grab the jacket!*'

\* \* \*

They made it like a quarter mile down past the brush and the road before Alessa noticed that Heather was bleeding.

‘Oh, *shiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit*,’ Alessa gasped, fingering Heather’s gash by the piss-yellow glare of the streetlights. It wasn’t that deep, but the wound had been weeping (the rhythmic *sfqlech* of her wet sock had given the cut away). They looked where they’d come from and followed a trail of crimson flickering in the moonlight leading back uphill to the cemetery.

‘Does it hurt?’ Alessa sounded worried.

‘Not really,’ Heather burped.

*Must’ve grazed the wire*, she thought.

‘Here,’ Alessa handed Heather her jacket. ‘Hold this.’

Alessa grabbed the edges of her threadbare, pockmarked Unknown Pleasures shirt, then pulled it off in a single graceful motion that left her almost seasick. She wasn’t wearing a bra, and she gripped at the shirt with her teeth, exposing her pits as she tore. Heather swooned, and in the next breath Alessa was pulling the newly cropped tee over her head, holding a jagged piece of fabric in her left hand.

‘Been meaning to do that,’ she smarted. Her stomach heaved, and she ducked around Heather. The wound wasn’t that deep but it was still weeping. Her breath grazed Heather’s thigh and made her tremble. She wished she didn’t want so badly for Alessa to suck her off then and there right out in the open. She always felt so deliciously fragile in her presence, but feared this sensation all the same. She couldn’t put a finger on it. So she drifted off elsewhere instead.

‘How does that feel?’

‘I’m gonna be honest,’ Heather slurred, stepping back, looking at the knot against the mottled black pavement, ‘I can’t feel much of anything.’ This concerned her, since apparently she had lost quite a bit of blood. She usually got a little spacey on dates, but it was never quite *this* bad. *Fucking*— She didn’t want to dwell here. ‘C’mon, let’s just go.’

They started walking down the hill towards the beach.

‘We should probably get some alcohol on that’

‘What. You don’t think there’s enough in my blood already?’

Alessa stopped by the pier to look out at the water. Heather rushed to catch up but heard something strange from the brush in a crevice behind them. Clatter and squeak, conspicuously intermittent beneath the drone of cicadas and the summer breeze.

Heather approached the thicket and parted it like a curtain. Four beady black specks stared back at her in the moonlight. Her eyes dilated, taking in the strangeness of their forms, stubby stonelike claws and marbled shells glistening wet beneath each other the moonlight.

Soon as the girls realized what they were looking at, the snappers resumed their copulation with a defiant *clunk!*

The two backed away and the tangle folded back in on itself. Their ankles dragged into the shallows, wet sand sucking at their feet. Heather's blood seeped out into the lake, tinting the water pink as it dissipated. They just stood and soaked there for a while, quiet save the sounds of their breath.

Then:

'Guess it really is turtles all the way down.'

Heather didn't even think it was very funny, but soon she was keeled over with laughter, long black hair grazing the water. Shortly thereafter Alessa was laughing along with her, mostly only because Heather was laughing. *Two dumb babies feeding off each others energies.*

Alessa wound up laughing so hard she barfed. It all came up in a single uninterrupted stream of red, gushing out of her mouth in a prolonged fountainous splash.

Naturally, they both got out of the lake pretty quickly.

'*Gyah,*' she spit, '*Ugh. Fuck. I'm so sorry...*'

'It's ok!' Heather really didn't mind. She motioned to Alessa's face. 'You got something...' she trailed off in a polite gesture, avoiding mentioning the ick, instead making a vague motion beneath her neck. Alessa wiped her mouth on the inside of her arm, then wiped that on her shirt and sniffed.

‘You still got that water bottle?’

‘*Fuck* no, I wish...’

\* \* \*

They took their shoes off before getting in the car and cleaned themselves up with baby wipes. They’d both managed to work up quite a bit of a sweat. Alessa washed the bad taste out with half a can of warm energy drink and a piece of gum.

Alessa turned the engine over. Music came on; some band Heather could’ve sworn was Crystal Castles if Alessa hadn’t told her already that it *wasn’t* Crystal Castles.

‘I should probably tell you something,’ Alessa burped. She turned the volume down. ‘I, uh. I don’t think I can have you over tonight? My, uh. My roommate’s running a tabletop game, so he’s got company...’ She said all this with an emphasis on the uncool.

‘Is that a problem?’

‘Well... I mean... we couldn’t really make any noise...’

Heather shrugged. ‘We could always go back to my place?’

She fronted “inconvenienced” but breathed much easier now. Heather had been looking forward to this date for the last couple weeks (it *was* a date, right?) but she had never been to Alessa’s place. Transfeminine bedrooms were always such a crapshoot, you never knew what you were gonna get. Some tryhard with unsteamed flags, framed affirmations, a vision board, or — *God forbid* — a vanity, littered with makeup pallets and gunky nail polish bottles; empty Monster cans, dirty underwear, cum-soaked tissues strewn about; embarrassing utilitarian vestiges from past lives, like the college dorm twin mattress, filthy blue sheets... Heather knew she needed enough room to spread herself out. She never could fall asleep in somebody else’s bed.

‘Yea, no, that’s fine with me,’ Heather smiled, ‘my roommate’s out tonight anyways.’ She rolled her eyes. ‘Graveyard shift.’

‘Funny,’ Alessa sneered . ‘Uh... *Shoot*. Here...’ She handed her her phone. ‘Think you could put in your address?’

They didn’t make it very far. About 22 feet, to be exact. Alessa barely slammed the brakes fast enough to avoid smashing sideways into the row of cars opposite the road.

‘Ha ha. Nope.’ She put it in reverse and swerved it right back to where they were just a few moments ago.

So it was settled, then.

Alessa cut the engine and leaned her seat back. The moonlight gleamed off her collarbone like some blade in an anime. That kind of unreal sort of reflection you don’t usually see outside an illustration.

Heather fidgeted with her jelly choker. Clichéd, yet... she felt very self-conscious (naturally; she’d been reading this book her ex gave her for her birthday last year). Alessa was disarmingly pretty, and it was starting to make Heather feel dysphoric. Her mind wandered to the waitlist for her tracheal shaving. *Should I call them?* She didn’t really want much more. Maybe laser.

Alessa didn’t know or even give a shit what Heather thought. She just smiled and put her hand on her leg. Heather blushed, but she felt guilty, too. She always hated when she got like this. She was doing that thing again where she started using others to feel shittier about herself. Spite and bitter jealousy masquerading as adoration; it was childish, *dumb*. She didn’t even feel *that* dysphoric about her face, not like *other* girls she’d known...

*Shut the fuck up.* Heather abandoned the thought. She’d done this whole routine more times than she could count. Even her therapist called her out.

And then she found herself lost in another memory. Her mom used to show her photos of her dad (deceased) to demonstrate what she’d look like when she got older. But she didn’t want to look like her dad. She wanted to look like her sister.

After all, the two used to look so much alike. Family members always mistook them for twins. They used to dress up as each other and

swap classes at school as a joke, until their subtly changing bodies eventually rendered their wardrobes irreconcilable.

She used to have dreams of waking up to find she was someone else and wondered if there was any way to manifest this. Witchcraft seemed ripe with possibility but Heather never had the faith to commit to a spell, let alone gather resources or build herself an altar. She'd read of metamorphosis somewhere in a science book, sequenced images showing worms cocooning and blossoming into something beautiful, but humans weren't meant to achieve this state.

As she got older she found herself spending more time in the mirror. The more concrete her reflection became, the more it seemed to shift and warp, never quite seeming to settle, like she couldn't quite ever recognize herself, even after all she'd done to correct her image... It was *female*, at least, but whatever stared back wasn't *her* any more; it seemed something inhuman, without an immutable shape.

She wondered what might happen should she let it take control. In the moments when it *did* scare the fuck out of her. Perhaps...

'Hey.' Their eyes met in the dark. Alessa seemed worried. Heather hadn't said anything for a minute or two. 'You alright?'

\* \* \*

This awful thing always happened when Heather got drunk like this. Large swaths of night seemed to pass without her. She was still aware of the passage of time, and to all outward appearances remained coherent, but her presence came and went without her.

Right now Heather couldn't remember how they'd gotten into the backseat with her shorts around her ankle, flung up towards a fogged up window, with Alessa's mouth wrapped around her cock.

Alessa loved the smell of blood coming from the coagulating wound beneath Heather's ass. She stopped short of licking it, wondered

*when was the last time I ate cis girl pussy?* Alessa's ex kept her on call for years after they broke up because Alessa was literally the only person her ex knew who'd eat her out on her period. Up until she realized that the whole sissy thing wasn't just a passing phase.

Alessa didn't realize how much she missed the smell of blood. This moment felt precious. She could float here forever; or at least until her throat got sore. She slid her tongue around Heather's clit and felt her dick twitch against the back of her throat. Heather arched back, moaned and clenched her teeth, gripping Alessa's hair tight.

Alessa couldn't tell she was faking it. Heather felt herself fading through in fits and spurts, like she was watching it all from the outside in. It was always like this. Her body meant nothing. But Heather's will was good. She wondered if she could clench herself into being, if only just a little while. Long enough to convince herself to cum down her throat. Anything she could to make this into something real.

WORLD  
WIDE  
WIDE  
WIDE

# BECAUSE I WAS

in love. I was dating another writer at the time and I wrote *Sour Milk* to impress them and clue them in on what I wanted in the bedroom without telling them outright so I could make myself more vulnerable or some other circuitous shit but it just wasn't enough to save our relationship. Why would it? I wasn't using my words. It was dumb to think writing a book alone would be enough to keep us together.

Art typically comes from of a place of desire. You have to want to make something in the first place. Otherwise it's just work, and then what's the point? Nevertheless, I was jealous of the way others seemed to write like they weren't afraid to get fired. Some of these seemed more like sex personals than stories. Basically, my mind was opened. I wasn't going to put my dick or anus in here, but now I know there's a precedent for books with dicks and anuses. Why can't I be so brazen?

My early problem with this approach was the lack of transparency. While I respect such projects as an exercise in masturbation I can't help but call to question the implications in being the sole representative of self. How do you trust a girl whose entire presentation is curated and subjective? This is why I'm not going to fuck you. It wouldn't feel right. I'd much prefer we view each other as a stranger.

As much as we'd like to pretend otherwise, there will always be a barrier between us. You have no awareness of the edits we make behind the scenes or what words we choose leave behind. Personifying the self in a work is a bit of a magic act. Don't you understand? It's all going on behind the scenes but there's no pulling back the curtain between you and the page. You can't know. This is as close as we're going to get.

I was unhappy with the last afterword I wrote for *Sour Milk*. I wanted another stab at it since last time around I wasn't entirely honest. I rarely do psychedelics, and I've never read *Nevada* by Imogen Binnie

on acid, let alone any novel. I just thought it would be funny to say I did?

The truth is I don't want disclosure. It's important to keep our secrets. The closet, so rightfully maligned, still has its utility as a place of safety. The self can and will be weaponized against us by those who would much rather see us dead than living well. To optimize my revenge I won't give you my true self. In this context I can lie to you all I want.

I used to frown upon such navel-gazing until I realized the false sense of superiority stems from Catholic shame, and as a proud transsexual faggot I do not wish to live in shame. This is why we broke our covenant with God; or at the very least Catholicism. Shame is the mind-killer. Shame is the little death that brings total obliteration. We must make ourself to become shameless. Others will not be so gentle.

What I'm trying to say is I wrote *Sour Milk* in part to get in touch with myself. It was a desperate ploy at masturbation. I was coming at it left-handed with a disadvantage. More or less: when I was ten I was institutionalized and put on antipsychotics which turned me a ghost of a person until I quit taking them in my twenties. Depersonalization and derealization transformed sex into something outside the realm of the senses or even fun. For the longest time I didn't experience pleasure directly but rather from the act of giving pleasure itself.

I naturally became obsessed with pornography throughout my life. The first porn I ever saw was an act of bestiality a kid showed to me on a bus on his portable DVD player that haunted me through finding my dad's tranny porn stash. I wound up fairly sex-negative in college, due in large part to childhood sexual trauma and religious upbringing.

As you can probably tell my relationship to transsexual pornography is complicated. In college my best friend would masturbate to it in front of me when we were drinking because that's the kind of shit he'd do to get a rise. I just thought that was what boys do because that's what boys have always done to me. Occasionally he would molest me to it, as a joke. Obviously problematic. I had a crush on him, so I let it happen, though I tried not to like it because I didn't want to be gay.

What's worse, the women in these videos were impossibly beautiful. I was jealous. I didn't come out for the first three years I took estrogen so I was afraid to buy girl's clothes. Besides, I was working two jobs in food service while homeless and couch surfing. I didn't have time or space for a wardrobe. I wanted what they had with a blatant disregard for how they got it. I wanted men to fuck me like that, but I couldn't tell my fiancé at the time, who was in California supporting me financially working on a now-cancelled Adult Swim show made by alt-right trolls whose political affiliations she claimed she did not know.

No, I discovered myself in the many gigabytes of SuicideGirls porn said college bestie loaned me on a USB drive around the time I was twenty? I wanted to look just like them back then, but I lived with my parents, and my therapists said I wasn't trans because I liked my cock too much and my dysphoria stemmed from not working out enough; besides, tattoos are expensive. I couldn't even afford to buy porn.

When I started actually getting laid in my early twenties it was mostly as a means of escape. I was going out three or four times a week and not getting home until six or seven in the morning. Often I'd go home with an older woman who would buy me drunk and fuck me in the backseat of her car and force me cum inside her then take me back to her place to smoke weed or do cocaine and make me fuck her some more. One girl called me half a year later to tell me she got an abortion three months ago. Guess that's where I get my mommy complex.

Many of these stories were inspired by these experiences. But not all of them, obviously. None of them came from anywhere traumatic. Some were inspired by grunge or death metal lyrics. Most of them are me thinking about movies I'd been watching or hentai I rediscovered from my very first laptop. One was about something else entirely.

I wrote the first eight stories in this volume comprising *Sour Milk* in one month each while working overtime at a Korean fried chicken bibimbap restaurant. I would get home and get drunk and look at cishet porn because I thought it wouldn't make me feel as dysphoric as t4t then I would cum and feel dysphoric, obviously. I'd start writing around

two or three in the morning. If you read *Sour Milk* in its original state I would like to apologize. If not then please disregard this.

*Sour Milk* did not help me save my relationships or make me a better lover or a good friend or teach me anything about who I was or what I wanted or cum. I was a wreck for a while because I refused to love myself as artistic technique. I thought my misery would improve my writing. Looking back, I don't think it did. I wasn't very happy back then. But I did make enough money to buy myself a new laptop.

I wrote *Final Fantasy Fan Fiction* as part of a project a friend was working on I'm not sure if I can really talk about. As it developed through the end of 2022 it became more of a spiritual sequel to *Sour Milk* and increasingly self-centered. I wanted to amend myself a happy ending to a book I'd originally closed by fantasizing about killing myself.

I wanted to, and then some people I knew died for real and it became something else entirely. I'm still not entirely sure what I meant to say or why. Heaven knows what. I wasn't quite myself at the time.

I wrote *Lost Dogs: Rarities & B-Sides* between 2018 and 2023. Some was intended for *FFFF* and some for a now-canceled sequel to *Sour Milk* titled "*Sweet Cream*". I abandoned the project because I decided I never want to be exactly the same girl twice.

I wrote this for the sluts because I wanted to be just like them. But I could've been more ethical. It's so easy to confuse desire for empathy and project yourself on others. I believed if I'd been through everything you had I'd somehow have turned out less traumatized, or at the very least more normal about sex. But I know now we are not each other. Understanding doesn't mean you understand. Sorry I was ever so naive.

I got sloppy. I love making messes and cleaning them back up and putting shit back together figuring it out as I go along but I'm afraid I can't break this any more if I tried and if I did I wouldn't know where all the pieces are supposed to go anymore. I'm afraid of what might happen without something to bind me. I set myself back on the shelf.

My goal with this project was to disappear completely up my own ass, or at the very least learn how to suck my own cock without surgery.

I went beyond fake and became a monster. But I couldn't recognize the beauty behind her creation. Natalie Celeste Tautou was never real. She made herself up only to fuck me. Of course she would be beautiful.

Don't confuse this for self-negativity. I have regrets, but I don't regret who I've been or am now. I wouldn't be writing this if I wasn't someone else from when I started. I would probably be dead.

Would you still fuck me like this? I would fuck me. I'm always fucking me. Everything we do with us is sexual. You don't know anything about that, though. I know better than to kiss and tell. Never give them anything for free.

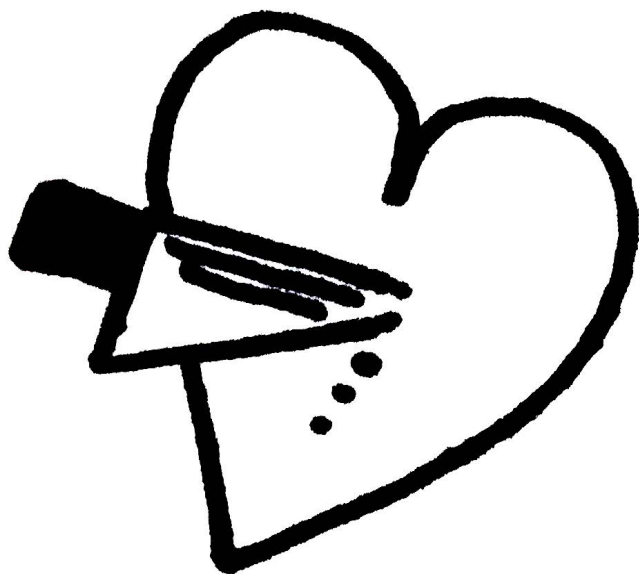
The plan when I started was always for some kind of suicide. Metaphorically, of course; if only to distract myself from darker intentions. It is very hard to imagine the unthinkable and follow through, knowing how profoundly doing so would hurt the ones you love. But we went soft in the end. Thank goodness. I'm so happy to be here now with you.

Sadly that's not who I was when I first wrote *Sour Milk*. I've made her bed; she'll die in it. We live for our pain and sorrow. If this is what her heart desires, I'll be honored to hold the knife. There's a space for us there. Let us not overthink it. We're dating now. We have an apartment.

In the end we can say we tried our best and had some good times together, I hope. But the curtain is rising and breaking our scene. Forgot what I dreamed about. Spoiled everything. Maybe it's all for the best. Acting is fun but it's never been my strong suit. Maybe I'll try my hand at costume design or lighting.

The other day I wore a skater dress to a basement show and made out with a stranger by the keg and got railed in the bathroom. On the long walk back to my place she told me about her sister's wedding and showed me pictures of her cat and we kissed in the moonlight. That never really happened but it made me think maybe human is not such a bad way to be after all. So I want to dream about something else for a change. Like falling in love again. Autofiction sucks shit anyways.

I wrote this



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*bless this mess.*

F.A.G. (2018-2023)

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*in loving memory of mira & eris*

